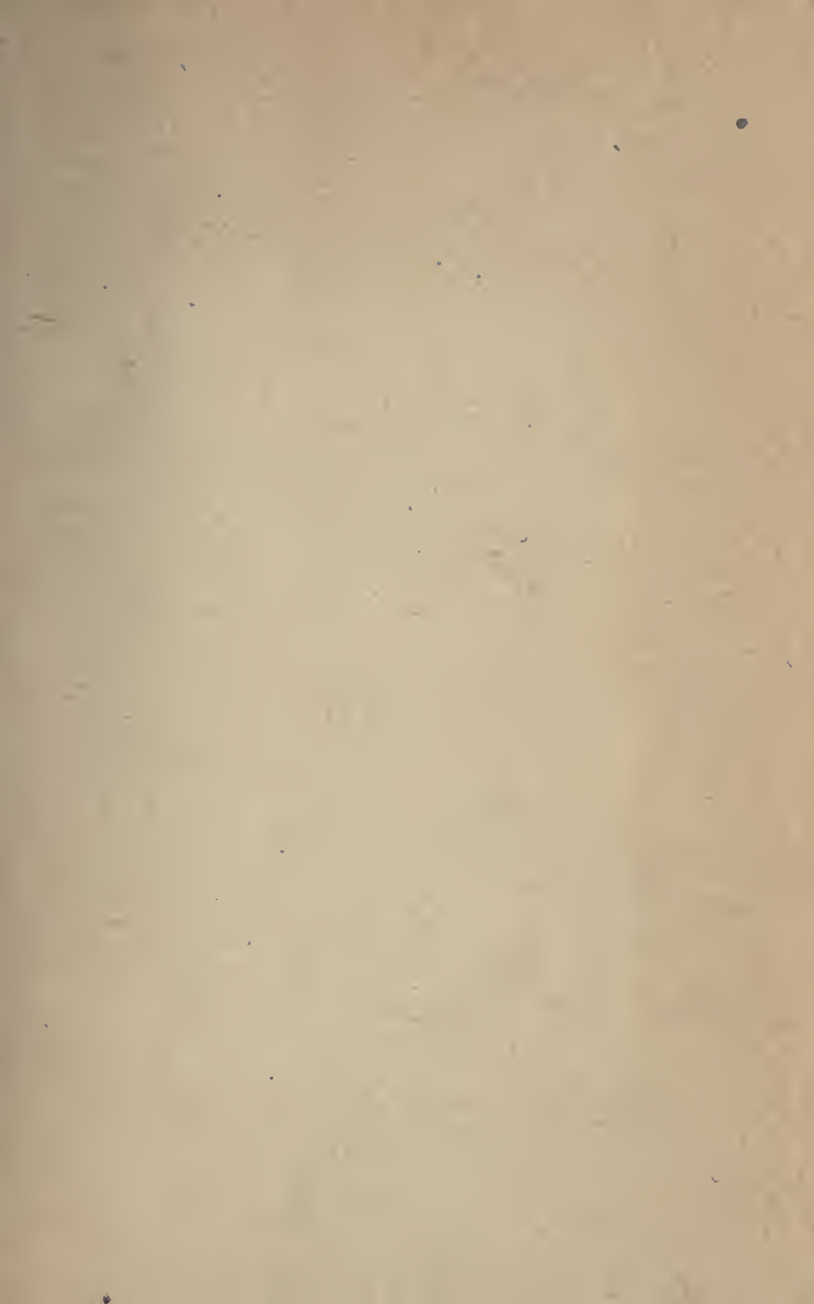


IT'S AN ILL WIND

DOUGLAS GOLDRING



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By DOUGLAS GOLDRING



LONDON: GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.
RUSKIN HOUSE 40 MUSEUM STREET, W.C.

First published in 1915

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IT'S AN ILL WIND—

CHAPTER I

THE first event of any importance in Rose's life, not counting a visit to the Zoo and one to Madame Tussaud's Exhibition, was her father's death, which occurred on a Sunday in November, just before her thirteenth birthday. The circumstances were dramatic, for Mr. Harford was actually engaged in delivering his evening sermon when he suddenly collapsed in the pulpit, and died almost immediately, of heart failure. Rose never forgot seeing him crumple up, nor the curious thud he made as he fell. All that happened on that memorable evening impressed itself on her memory. She could recall for years afterwards that scene of hubbub and commotion in the church, the appearance of the ambulance in which her father's body was wheeled back to the Vicarage, and the feeling of excitement and horror induced in her by the unusual darkness of the house, the whisperings of the servants, and the lamentations of her mother. All of it formed her first introduction to "things happening." From

her earliest childhood she had wanted things to happen, had waited breathless with anticipation for the curtain to ring up on the pantomime of life. Here was the first act, at last, and a scene so exciting that it might well have figured in one of the romances of Miss Charlotte M. Yonge.

A true Londoner, even at thirteen, Rose had enjoyed it all to the utmost.

For her father as a person (and not as an institution) she had few regrets; for she had never known any more of him than that he was very large and dignified and important, that he presided at "meetings," and spoke always at home in the same booming, resonant voice that he employed for reading the lessons. He had never encouraged or allowed her to play with him, and never took her for nice walks on Hampstead Heath, or to eat ices at Buszard's. His attitude had always been that "the proper place for little girls is in the nursery"; and Rose hated proper places. She also invariably hated her nurse—Mrs. Harford liked them old and ugly—and envied all the other children who looked as if they enjoyed their walks on the Heath so much more than she did hers.

Though Rose had never liked her parent during his lifetime, his death (and particularly his funeral) lent him a kind of posthumous splendour in her eyes. The day of the funeral was one prolonged excitement. Rose wore black kid gloves,

a new black coat and skirt, and a black straw hat; indeed, an unprecedented attention was paid to her appearance by her mother. At about half-past twelve two or three men dressed in black suits and top-hats, and several ladies also in black, with elaborate furs, drove up to the Vicarage in broughams, and were shown into the drawing-room. Rose heard the housemaid tell the cook in the kitchen that they were "reading the Will." Then, later on, crowds of people arrived for luncheon, all in carriages. Rose had never known her home to be so full of visitors, and it gave her a sense of importance to feel that her father had so many friends, and that they were all so sorry he was dead.

The phrase "Poor, dear Edmund, *how* he will be missed!" was on everybody's lips, and quite a number of aunts and relations, beside her mother and herself, seemed to have been shedding tears. Rose came in for a great deal of attention, when she was waiting in the drawing-room among the visitors for luncheon to be announced. Ladies whom she understood vaguely were "relations," asked her if she were "little Rose," said, "Give me a kiss, darling," and pecked or patted her. One of these, a surprising old woman with white hair, fierce black eyes and eyebrows and a nose like a bird's beak, caught her by the shoulder, stared at her through *lorgnettes*, and did not make any attempt to peck her. She was not at all

unkind, however. "Well, Rose," she said, "I suppose it is too early for the thorns yet, but they'll grow soon enough, or I'm a blind old woman! But after all, it's other people they wound, my dear, isn't it? And *they* don't matter!" She went off into a little peal of laughter after this, and Rose thought she must certainly be a witch. The old woman remarked, however, that she was her great-aunt Louisa.

At luncheon, Rose sat next to a boy of about fifteen, who announced himself as a "kind of cousin" of her father's. She had hardly ever spoken to a boy in her life before except her brother, James, and he didn't count. Besides, James was five years older than she was. This boy showed her a stop-watch which he used for timing sprints. He confided to her that he had done the hundred yards race in the sports that year in just under 12 seconds, and that $10\frac{3}{4}$ seconds was the school record. His name, he added, was Adrian Corbet, and he lived in Essex with Great-aunt Louisa. Rose told him that Aunt Louisa was her great-aunt too, and glanced down the table to where old Miss Corbet was talking to her mother. She could not help noticing that Aunt Louisa was more severe-looking even than Mamma, and seemed every bit a match for her. Mrs. Harford was a short, thin-lipped, stern woman who rarely smiled, and looked habitually on the gloomy side of life. She wore her coal-

black hair brushed tightly from her forehead and gathered into a neat "bun" at the back, like a school ma'am. The stubborn sense of duty, legacy of covenanting ancestors, which was her most noteworthy characteristic, was expressed in every feature of her face, as was also the lack of humour which made it impossible for her ever to take things smoothly. She was a woman who seemed designed by Nature to be a heroine in some period of great affliction and distress, when a passive courage, self-abnegation, and the capacity to endure intense physical suffering were the qualities demanded. As the wife of a soldier during the horrors of the Indian Mutiny, her name would probably have gone down with glory to posterity. She found it difficult to adjust herself to a comfortable life, the "sorrows" of which were merely those to which all flesh is heir, and Aunt Louisa regarded her (unjustly) as a "snuffling humbug," because of the to-do she seemed always to be making, about nothing.

Aunt Louisa had never felt the charm of self-abnegation. She cherished her self-respect, and her courage was of the kind which laughs at the approach of danger, and slaps the enemy in the face. She had no intention of enduring the faintest inconvenience to please anybody. She seemed to radiate an air of importance, and people instinctively deferred to her. She occupied a prominent position at the service in church, and

Rose noticed that a maid accompanied her to her seat, and that she walked with the aid of an ebony walking-stick.

Rose found the funeral service enormously impressive. There was a bishop there, and the chancel seemed to be full of the most beautiful clergymen in scarlet hoods. She had never known the choir sing so well before, and the thought that her father would have been pleased if he could have heard them was one of the first things which made her realize the dreadfulness of death. Later on, at the graveside, she was too miserable because of her own discomforts to think of anything else. A heavy November drizzle was falling, and she felt sure she would catch a bad cold in her head from it. It was awful when they lowered the coffin in, and the clergyman threw pieces of earth down which rattled on the lid. This part genuinely frightened her, and made her want to go back home quickly. James, however, insisted on standing and looking into the hole a long while after they had both thrown down the lilies which they had been given for that purpose. It seemed very stupid, but then, James always did seem stupid. Rose wished the boy Adrian would come and talk to her once more, but he seemed to have disappeared after the service with Aunt Louisa. She hoped she would see him again, and that he would tell her some more about stop-watches, but she knew

instinctively it would be no good asking Mamma about him. She would simply have to trust to luck.

When at last they got back to the Vicarage the house seemed horribly depressing. A reaction overcame Rose, after the excitements of the week, and she cried bitterly in her bedroom, without really knowing why she was weeping.

Mrs. Harford did not come down to dinner that night, but she came into Rose's room and kissed her at bedtime, telling her to be a good girl, and to put her faith in Christ and never to forget to say her prayers. Rose did not quite see why her father's death should make it any more necessary to say her prayers, but she promised her mother that she would be good.

CHAPTER II

MRS. HARFORD had certainly not been left well off by her husband, but her temperament inclined her unnecessarily to exaggerate her poverty. It became an obsession with her to tell her children that she "couldn't afford" this, or was "too poor" to do that, so that in spite of the fact that their circumstances were really quite comfortable, both James and Rose always felt the sting of penury acutely while they lived at home. Mrs. Harford made no secret that the butter was only "second best," referred constantly to the fact that she could now afford only one servant, and was always making exasperating small economies in the most public manner possible.

When she had to leave St. Chad's Vicarage to make way for the new incumbent, she took a small but attractive old house on Haverstock Hill, not far from the eastern side of Hampstead Heath. It was one of a terrace of Georgian houses, built of sun-baked, yellow bricks, and was pleasantly overgrown with creepers. There was a large garden at the back which could just be discerned—a framed vista of green—when the front door

was opened, and gave the house a restful, countrified air. Inside, it had a good deal of old panelling enamelled white, a broad staircase, and a general feeling of spaciousness not often achieved by modern architects with the same area at their disposal. And yet, in spite of its outward charm, to those sensitive to the atmosphere of houses, there was a lack of joyousness about "St. Chad's" that was subtly repellent. The servant was elderly, angular, and disagreeable. The furniture in the rooms was stiff and ugly; there were no pictures on the walls; the house did not possess a piano, and the only books were such of her husband's theological library as Mrs. Harford had been unable to sell. Mrs. Harford did not believe in frivolity. The daughter of a Lowland Scots minister, her marriage with Edmund Harford, which had been considered such a "fine thing" for her by all her relatives, had brought little happiness with it. She never got on with her husband's wealthy English connections. They were like foreigners to her; she could not understand them in the least, and their flippant points of view horrified her. Her husband was not flippant, and he had none of the humour possessed by the other members of his family, but she found his pompousness even more trying than their levity. The discrepancy between his public piety and the unedifying sides of his character which he displayed in the privacy of his home angered

her. She had in some respects a keen intuition, and she quickly came to think him a humbug. From "thought" to verbal reproach was but a short step, and her married life had been embittered in consequence. Religion was the only thing of any importance in life for her, and even her quarrels with her husband became confused with her religious emotionalism. This sometimes resulted in a curious bandying of biblical phrases. The Reverend Edmund, who was a High Churchman of a school now become rather old-fashioned, used to say matins in church every morning before breakfast, at half-past eight. This service was never attended by any one save Mrs. Harford, and when annoyed she used to be unable to avoid repeating verses of the psalms with a particular emphasis.

" 'Lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces, while there is none to deliver,' " she would recite, with deep feeling. To this the Vicar would reply with unction: " 'O Lord, my God, if I have done this: if there be iniquity in my hands.' " Then Mrs. Harford would return to the charge. " 'The Lord shall judge the people: judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness, and according to my integrity that is in me.' " To which the Vicar would retort, in particularly crushing tones: " 'Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end: but establish the *just*.' "

It was not very edifying, and to save trouble Edmund Harford gradually took to humouring and hoodwinking his wife, after which things ran more smoothly. She had the good qualities of her defects, and in all essentials she was extremely loyal to him, and helped him in his work in every way she could. She felt his loss deeply, for it was a conviction with her that the good wife automatically loves her husband, and even while she "chastened" him she always told herself (and honestly believed) that she was doing it out of the finest and highest kind of affection. The same kind of love which she had given to her husband she gave, in a sense, to her children. It was a jealous love, of which fault-finding was perhaps the leading feature. She wished passionately for them to be good, and it was her secret ambition that one or other of them should answer a call to serve Christ in the mission-field or in some form of conventual life. She herself would dearly have liked to live under the rule of a Religious community, and since this was not possible it grew to be the desire of her life that one or other of her children should secure the felicity which she had been denied. But when she came to study her children with this end in view, neither of them seemed particularly hopeful. In James it was indeed hard to find anything to blame; but if he did not sink, neither did he soar. He had the mental and physical stoop and

the even tones of the moderate man. He was precise and accurate in his language, and his points of view on all matters of moral conduct were above reproach, and scrupulously in accordance with the best traditions of the English gentleman. His mother could see him with the eye of imagination as the perfect stockbroker, churchwarden, and paterfamilias. His career at Winchester had been blameless and uneventful. She saw him, with satisfaction, as a comfort to herself in her old age, and already in anticipation she caressed her well-washed grandchildren. But though she rejoiced honestly enough in James's virtues, it was on Rose that her chief hope was fixed. She looked towards Rose and yearned, with an almost girlish freshness and enthusiasm, for her to fulfil her cherished ambition. Rose, however, was very much an unknown quantity. Mrs. Harford could not make her out, and found her baffling and odd, though very fond of going to church. Of one thing she was quite determined, that she would preserve Rose as much as possible from the flippant and worldly Harford family. Luckily, very few of her husband's relatives troubled to make friendly advances. On the one occasion when Louisa Corbet invited Rose to spend a week at Old Compton Hall, her tumble-down place in Essex, Mrs. Harford returned a polite but firm refusal. The invitation was not renewed.

Up till the time of her father's death Rose had been instructed by an elderly governess, who came for three hours every day. She was not particularly efficient, and as Mrs. Harford was anxious for her daughter to be well educated, she was faced with the choice of sending her either to some local day-school or to a boarding-school. The day-school she dreaded, because of the walk to and fro which it necessitated, and the opportunities of meeting boys and undesirable girls. Mrs. Harford had heard all the stories which mothers tell one another on these subjects, and her lively imagination easily added to them. She decided, therefore, that it would be best to send Rose to a boarding-school, and after taking the advice of several clergymen whom she respected, she eventually entered her daughter at St. Ursula's school, at Westborough in Sussex. This school was entirely managed by a community of Anglican Sisters, and not the least of its attractions in Mrs. Harford's eyes was the fact that at St. Ursula's Rose might grow to love the sisterhood and feel, within her own heart, a vocation for the Religious life.

CHAPTER III

ROSE'S opening day at St. Ursula's was the second event of importance in her career, and she remembered it in after-life almost as vividly as she remembered the days of her father's death and funeral, and of her meeting with Adrian Corbet. Her mother accompanied her on the journey to Westborough, and urged her not to be homesick and to be good, while she had hardly been able to conceal her excitement at the thought of meeting all kinds of other girls of her own age. She promised fervently not to be homesick. At the school, a red-brick building of pseudo-Gothic architecture, surrounded by a charming garden, there had been a large crowd of pupils with their mammas, and she had been introduced to the Mother Superior, to the Sister under whose special care she had been placed, and to the Rev. Silas Winslow, the Warden of the community, who had been a friend of her father's. Mr. Winslow, who was the only man allowed on the premises, showed them the chapel and talked to them with the sickly affability of a schoolmaster handling parents. He said he would ask Rose to tea later in the term (and forgot to do so). On the whole, Rose

was very glad indeed when they had all gone and she had taken her last tearful farewell of her mother. She was eager to see and talk to the girls who were to be her companions.

When the strangeness of being away from home had worn off, Rose quickly began to enjoy the excitement of school-life. She loved hearing from the other girls about the things they did in the holidays, and drank in with avidity stories of dances and theatre parties and visits to the Pantomime or to the Earl's Court Exhibition. She enjoyed the walks along the front at Westborough when she went out in the afternoon with the "crocodile," and the chances of being looked at by boys. All the other girls seemed to have either brothers or boy friends, and to know all about the mysterious opposite sex, and so for want of any one better, Rose began to weave a web of romance round Adrian, and to talk about him to her bosom friends. In the holidays she asked her mother whether there was any chance of her seeing him again, and Mrs. Harford's rather crushing retort lent Adrian the additional glamour of persons and things *verboten*.

Before Rose had been at the school a year she began to display all kinds of awkward curiosities in the holidays, and to show a desire to be taken to amusements, and to ask her girl friends to tea. These wishes Mrs. Harford gratified as sparingly as she could. She was not, however,

dissatisfied with her daughter's progress towards the goal she had designed for her, and there were moments when it seemed that the things for which she longed were certain of realization. On the occasion of Rose's Confirmation there had been prostrations and long prayers and the weeping of penitential tears on the girl's part. A shrewd observer might have given a simple enough explanation for all this emotionalism, but her mother did not fail to put it down to a great awakening of Rose's spiritual life.

On the whole, Mrs. Harford felt happy about her daughter, though as Rose grew older and entered on her sixteenth year she detected the presence of a fresh danger. Rose was going to be beautiful. In spite of the straight plaits in which her hair was twined and her unbecoming, *backfisch* frocks, it was impossible not to see in her the promise of an unusual loveliness. What would be the effect on Rose's emotional nature, Mrs. Harford asked herself through sleepless nights, when she discovered herself to be possessed of this terrible power? She did her best by clothing her daughter in severely "sensible" garments to prevent her from becoming aware of it as long as possible.

The question of clothes formed one of the first points of active dissension between mother and daughter. Rose quoted "the other girls." Mrs. Harford pleaded poverty, and pointed out that

the other girls' mammas could probably afford to give them less durable and more elaborate garments. There was no definite outburst, but Rose went back to school after these discussions in a sullen frame of mind, full of rebellion against her clumsy boots and ugly frocks. Her reports began to deteriorate in consequence. Her teachers found her insubordinate and intractable and inclined to be insolent, and she began to work less hard at her lessons. When she came to Hampstead for her summer holidays, after her sixteenth birthday, Mrs. Harford asked her whether she had grown to dislike her school very much, and if she were very homesick.

"Oh, rather not, Mother!" said Rose, with animation. "I simply love school!"

It was obvious from Rose's enthusiasm that, if anything, she preferred her school to her home, and this disquieted Mrs. Harford. It seemed to argue an undue weakening of her influence over her daughter.

"But surely, dear, you like being here with me and with your brother much more than being at school, don't you?"

Rose's reply, as she looked up at her mother out of her curious hazel eyes, was even more disturbing—

"How can you expect me to like home better, Mother, when I never see any other girls, and have no one to talk to?"

CHAPTER IV

MY DEAR RACHEL,

Adrian and I are staying in London for two days on our way to Scotland, and as it is some time since we met I propose to call on you to-morrow afternoon. I trust I may find you at home, and that you and your family are in good health.

Yours affectionately,

LOUISA CORBET.

Mrs. Harford read this letter to herself at breakfast with considerable annoyance, but as she could think of no reasonable excuse for putting off Aunt Louisa, she prepared herself for the inevitable.

"Aunt Louisa is coming to tea to-morrow," she remarked to Rose, without comment. Rose inquired if Adrian were coming too, and Mrs. Harford said she did not know. Rose had the wit to say nothing more on the subject and to conceal her excitement from her mother, but on the following day she went up early to her room after luncheon to get ready for her meeting with the fairy prince. Her room was at the top of the house, at the back, and had three small windows looking out over the garden. The paint on the window-frames and the distemper on the walls were of an unsullied white, suitable to her age and sex, and the only note of colour in the room was

supplied by the dark blue curtains. A large crucifix hung over the wall above her narrow iron bed, but there were no pictures in the room and no superfluous furniture. It was as nearly as possible like the cell of a Sister of Mercy. The bookcase contained little save books of a highly moral tone: Lives of the Saints, Concordances, and a St. Thomas à Kempis "On the Imitation of Christ." In spite of her growing preoccupation with the mysterious "forbidden" subjects, and her curiosities about the world, Rose still cherished some of the ideals in which the Sisters and her mother had encouraged her, and would have much liked to become some special kind of saint. She did not quite know what sort of saint it would be. The choice lay between joining a community of walled Sisters, emigrating to some leper colony and becoming a female Father Damien, or plunging, as a missionary, into "the heart of savage Africa." She was still enough of a child to prefer, on the whole, "the heart of savage Africa."

She lay stretched out on her bed for a while, deep in thought, wondering what Adrian would look like now that he was almost grown-up. It was a delicious afternoon, warm and peaceful. Through her wide-open windows came the sound of the lawn-mower—a sound which seemed to her to convey, somehow, the whole charm of summer—and there came to her ears as she lay still the faint noises of insects and distant dronings of bees which

can be heard in all gardens on an August day. She wondered what Aunt Louisa (whom she dreaded) would say to her—and again about Adrian. Her thoughts were a confused medley of that species of romantic aspiration which is engendered in the minds of girls of religious upbringing by the reading of poems like Tennyson's "St. Agnes' Eve," and the more normal day-dreams suggested by the approaching arrival of a young, handsome, and "worldly" cousin. After a time she got up and sat in front of her looking-glass. As she examined herself she realized more acutely than ever before that having your hair brushed tightly back from the front of your head and severely plaited into two long pig-tails adorned with bows, was not by any means the most becoming way of doing it. And she took more interest now than usual in the fine texture of her clear, white skin, in the poise of her head, and in the graceful lines of her neck and shoulders. Her hair was extraordinarily dark, but her face was freshly coloured, and she had red, well-shaped lips, upon the upper of which she noticed, to her annoyance, one or two short black hairs.

She got into her best serge frock with more care than usual, and once more bemoaned its deficiencies and its excessive plainness. As she was doing up the hooks at the back she looked out of the window into the garden. Suddenly there was a considerable commotion ; the lawn-mower

was hurried away, and she saw her mother emerge from the summer-house and advance across the lawn with measured and stately pace. Mrs. Harford was dressed in stiff black silk, and her widow's cap, with its trailing streamers, added to the imposing effect. It *was* an imposing effect, in spite of Mrs. Harford's small number of inches, but it gave somehow a chilling impression on that August afternoon. Rose always thought her mother contrived to suggest an east wind. When Mrs. Harford smiled, it was like sunshine on the Shetland Islands in February: hardly strong enough to warm the air. The visitors had evidently made a premature arrival, and in a moment the meeting took place, just under Rose's window. There was the tall old woman with the ebony stick and the brilliant white hair and black eyebrows whom she remembered at the funeral, and there, at her side, but changed out of all recognition, was Adrian Corbet. His morning clothes made him look quite as grown-up as James, with whom she watched him shaking hands, and certainly much more attractive. She found herself consumed with interest in such details as his hat and walking-stick and gloves. While she was alternately giving the final touches to her appearance and peeping out of the window, the servant knocked at her door.

"Miss Rose, Miss Rose, will you come down into the garden, please."

It was with an unwonted nervousness that Rose, a moment later, greeted her relations. Aunt Louisa looked at her so fiercely from under those shaggy black eyebrows, that she trembled all over and could think of nothing else but the fib which she had told her mother the day before. She felt convinced that her aunt saw the details of it written on her face.

Adrian, somehow, was altogether different from what she had imagined. Most of the time he seemed to be laughing at her. This annoyed her at first, but eventually she came rather to appreciate it.

"I say, do you play tennis?" he asked. "What a jolly lawn this is!"

"I never get a chance," she confessed, in a tone of concentrated discontent.

"Let's go round the garden," said the inconsequent Adrian after tea. "I say, Mrs. Harford, can Rose show me your jolly garden?"

Mrs. Harford gave a grim assent, and the two young people departed forthwith. The garden was large for a London garden, and at the end of it there was a pleasant pathway, shaded from the public view by a long line of espalier fruit-trees and tall hollyhocks and sunflowers. Adrian made for this instinctively, and as soon as they were safely hidden behind the fruit-trees he pulled out a cigarette-case and asked if he might smoke. After this they took stock of one another solemnly,

like children at a party. To Rose, whose knowledge of young men was strictly limited, he seemed at first a little disappointing. Just as many people are bored in picture-galleries because they have not learned to appreciate, so she was unable through inexperience to pick out his points. Certainly he was quite unlike that elegant personage—half prince, half saint—who figured so often in her dreams, but all the same he was far from uninteresting. He had left his hat on the grass by the tea-table, so that she could see that his hair, which was brown, with glints of burnished copper in it, had a pleasant tendency to curl in front and over the ears. But, though he was tall and well made, he could hardly have been called good-looking. He had an odd, irregular face, with clear grey eyes, the skin round which was slightly wrinkled as though he laughed with them habitually, and his mouth had humour, and, in a curious way, a touch of appeal in it. The full lips would have suggested to an experienced woman a strain of sensuality, and the lines of the mouth and chin were not strong, and seemed to indicate a man whom passion might lead down ignoble paths. But his eyes and wide brow indicated as clearly the visionary, the man of high ideals. The opposing influences of the spirit and the flesh seemed to be about evenly balanced, and he was not yet old enough to have made and confirmed the decision as to which should have the predominance.

In Adrian's eyes Rose possessed but little interest. She seemed to be rather tall for her age, hideously dressed, and distinctly dull. He compared her mentally with the wife of his late house-master, a lady of mature charms, who had once squeezed his hand—very much to Rose's disadvantage. Their conversation was not animated at first until Rose began to talk to him about himself.

"How splendid it must be to be going up to Oxford!" she remarked tentatively. "I wish I could go, but I am afraid I could never pass the exams. to get into the girls' part."

"Oh yes, I expect it will be rather jolly," replied Adrian, beginning to melt under the soft influence of adulation. "I want to row, too, you know. I was in the boat at school."

"I should love to see the races," said Rose enthusiastically, "particularly if you were rowing for your college!" She proceeded to pump him about all the things that he intended to do, and Adrian found himself expanding. They sat down together on a seat at the end of a gravel walk, which was almost concealed by the leaves of a weeping ash, and Adrian began his confidences, while Rose listened with an absorbed attention. He mentioned how, after taking his degree, he intended to be ordained, and hoped to work in London, and added that Aunt Louisa was very disappointed with him for wanting to be a clergyman. Rose,

for a moment, found herself sympathizing with Aunt Louisa, but she hastily suppressed this impulse and began to tell him, instead, about her own plans in connection with "the heart of savage Africa." To her annoyance he received these intimate revelations with his indulgent but mocking smile. He did not seem at all "pi" for a young man who was going to take Orders, and his whole attitude towards life puzzled and intrigued her. Hitherto she had never met any one in her life who was enthusiastic about anything except Church work, the mission-field, and so on, with the exception of the girls at school. Adrian Corbet, however, seemed to have a hundred interests, and he talked to her of every subject under the sun except religion. When he mentioned, without a trace of self-consciousness, such forbidden subjects as plays and music-halls, she trembled with excitement. Even the books he talked about sounded far more thrilling than any she had come across in the dull shelves of her father's library, or had seen in James's flabby hands. James, indeed, was far too good a business man to read anything which did not yield full value for the energy expended. He read to acquire information, to instruct himself in certain kinds of facts or in order to assimilate the news of the day. Rose perceived instinctively that it was not about this kind of reading that Adrian was talking, and whilst pretending that the names of the books he men-

tioned were perfectly familiar to her, she was careful to make a note of them for future use. There was one novel in particular, among those to which he referred, that she determined to save up her money and buy, in spite of the fact that he had condemned it. This was "The Lady of Lowndes St.," by Meriel Vernon, which Adrian said was all the rage. He called it a vulgar society novel, and said that the libraries would have banned it if it hadn't been by some one who figured in Debrett. The thought of reading a book that ought to have been banned was like the prospect of taking a bite from the forbidden apple, and Rose's colour grew heightened with excitement. Adrian was prevented from innocently giving his cousin any more dangerous information by Mrs. Harford's summoning voice.

Aunt Louisa was apparently preparing to leave. Adrian threw away his cigarette and was startled to find his cousin's warm hand seeking his and squeezing it.

"You *will* ask us to Oxford for Eights Week, won't you?" Rose asked, panting with determination to make the most of her fleeting opportunity. Adrian noticed that with her increased colour she was really rather pretty, and had no hesitation in promising to do so. He was rewarded by a radiant smile, which warmed his vanity.

When they grew near the open French windows

of the drawing-room it became apparent that the relations between Aunt Louisa and Mrs. Harford were somewhat strained. The two women were glaring at one another in a way which made the air positively electric, and Rose heard her aunt say to her mother, "To turn the girl out on the streets just because she got kissed on the stairs is positively inhuman, Rachel, and you know it." She wondered about whom it could be that they were talking, but the subject was dropped hastily and Aunt Louisa rose to depart.

"I have been waiting for you for quite five minutes, Adrian," she said testily. "I shall miss my hot milk now, and the whole day will be spoilt!"

She touched Mrs. Harford on both cheeks, and then looked searchingly into Rose's eyes as she wished her good-bye.

"You are going to be dangerous, my dear, I can see *that*," she said, quite kindly. She tapped Rose on the cheek and smiled at her as she passed out of the room, and Rose did not know whether to be pleased or vexed.

CHAPTER V

THE latter part of the summer holidays Rose spent with her mother and brother at Folkestone. The rooms Mrs. Harford took for her family were poky and uncomfortable and some way from the Leas, while the bargain she struck with the landlady was so severe that Mrs. Wiggins wore on her face a permanent expression of ill-usage in consequence of it. A scene between Mrs. Wiggins and Mrs. Harford hung over them like a thundercloud during the whole month, but burst only on the day of their departure, when Mrs. Wiggins remarked with concentrated feeling that "she knew gentry, she did, and what's more she knew them as wasn't." As Rose's instincts were to be lavish with the lower orders, she suffered acutely from the landlady's ill-humour and her mother's frugality. She longed for her next term at school to begin, when she would meet all her girl friends again; and but for one incident, the daily routine of listening to the band with James in the morning, and listening to the band with James and Mamma in the afternoon, would have driven her wild with boredom.

The incident which mitigated the dullness of her holiday was the discovery, in the sitting-room of the lodging-house, of a battered, paper-covered copy of Meriel Vernon's wicked work, "The Lady of Lowndes St.," which had been left behind by some former visitor.

This was indeed a *trouvaille*, as Miss Crawley would have said, and as no one happened to be in the room at the time, Rose hurried up to her bedroom with it and buried it in the bottom of her trunk. That night she complained of a headache, and went up early to bed, locking her door. The longed-for moment had arrived! For three hours Rose read steadily, her mind a turmoil of emotions. Much of the story seemed very silly and disappointing, and described the love affairs of the heroine, a society woman, who had a baby when she wasn't married. Rose understood in a vague way that this was very wicked, but it was not so much the amorous adventures of the Lowndes Street lady which excited her, as the wonderful descriptions of life in London and in Paris which the book contained. The receptions at Lady Mildred's London house, the luncheon-parties at the Carlton, the description of the heroine's bedroom with its luxurious furniture, of her underclothes and scents and powders—all combined to show Rose a vista of "life" which was as entrancing as any which the arch-tempter could possibly have conjured up

for a young girl's eyes. Rose found these accessories far more exciting than the philanderings for which they formed the stage, and which had given the book its scarlet reputation. Not only was the life of the fast and great world in London described by Meriel Vernon, but she took her characters on a tour to Paris, to Trouville, to Monte Carlo, all of which were sufficiently vividly described to give Rose her first glimpse of *le monde ou l'on s'amuse*.

Rose was not a great reader, and "The Lady of Lowndes St." was the only modern novel she had ever come across. The effect it made on her was therefore all the more strong. After reading it her whole outlook changed. She no longer had day-dreams about "the heart of savage Africa," but instead thought, dreamt of, and pondered over "life" and the great world. When she went shopping with her mother, her eyes were now as sharp as gimlets. At the chemist's she examined all the most luxurious toilet accessories that were displayed, with curious and greedy eyes. Whenever she got an opportunity of discreetly observing the rich, she took it. She began to notice fashions, to notice the outward appearance of the men and women she saw on the Leas who came from the big hotels, and to revolt more fiercely than ever against the ugly clothes that she was forced to wear.

Rose took "The Lady of Lowndes St." back

with her to school that term—using the most elaborate precautions to prevent the Sisters seeing it—and during the whole of her last year the Sisters noticed, with dismay, a change in her character, for which they could not account. They never had anything definite to complain of—Rose was far too cute for that—but it was her appearance and “moral atmosphere” which troubled them. Physically, at seventeen, Rose was almost a woman, and there was a suggestion of sex magnetism about her thick, dark hair, hazel eyes, and red lips with their suspicion of *duvet*, which made the Sisters nervous. In their heart of hearts they were looking forward to her departure with impatience: she was disturbing.

Among the other girls Rose had in her last few terms at St. Ursula's an unquestioned ascendancy. She had far more personality and physical and mental vigour than the blonde milk-and-water misses who formed the majority of her companions, and in consequence she led them like sheep. “The Lady of Lowndes St.” was read and discussed in secret by all the girls of Rose's age, who brought out, each in turn, her store of information about the subjects with which it dealt. One of them had been kissed by a boy, while on a visit to some friends, just as she was coming out of the bathroom; another had spent the summer in a French watering-place where there was mixed bathing, and “the most extraordinary things used

to happen." Rose was rather annoyed at having no personal experiences to cap the stories of these insipid creatures, but she made up for it by the daring of her escapades at school. During her last term, on a warm evening in June, she conceived the idea of getting in some cigarettes, to smoke. This seemed deliciously "fast." The other girls in the sixth form were let into the secret, and the following morning a friendly gardener was approached and persuaded—partly by the offer of a bribe and partly by the natural weakness of man before the opposite sex—to obtain the cigarettes. The excitement throughout school-time was intense. During the half-hour after supper, when the older girls were allowed to walk about in the garden, the conspirators retired to a secluded shrubbery, where—by arrangement with the gardener—the cigarettes were to be deposited. There had been no hitch. The green cardboard box, containing twenty wicked white tubes, two for each girl, was discovered in the appointed spot. As all the elder girls slept in one dormitory, divided off into cubicles, it was decided that they should wait till after lights out for the orgie to begin.

When the Sister-in-charge made her rounds that night there was a kind of strained stillness about St. Agnes' dormitory which might have warned her—if she had not had absolute faith in her charges—that "something was up." But she saw

nothing except a holy peace, and gave the girls her blessing with a thankful heart. When the sound of her footsteps had died away, and the girls, from their knowledge of the rules of the community, were assured that she had not only gone to bed but had also put her light out, ten young heads peeped from over the bedclothes.

"It's all right!" whispered Rose, jumping out of bed and standing up in the moonlight which filtered through the casement windows, her plait of dark hair coiling like a snake down her back; "now's the time."

Nine other white figures threw back their bedclothes, eighteen feet of varying size and comeliness were thrust into slippers, and there was a general scuffling for dressing-gowns. Then, under Rose's guidance, the party advanced stealthily to a window at the end of the room, not usually opened, which was not overlooked by the other windows of the convent. This was, with extreme care, unbolted. It made such a loud creaking as it swung open that it jangled nerves already somewhat on edge, and some of the more timid spirits had to be reassured to prevent them from hurrying back to their beds. At last the window was full of eager faces, from the mouth of each of which protruded a white tube of tobacco. Efforts were made to light up. This occasioned the most reverberating noises, which sounded as though they must surely penetrate all through the

building ; but finally each cigarette was started, and the blissful moment had come. Some of the girls, who had been taught by their brothers to smoke, puffed quite complacently, but Rose was not one of these. With her cigarette grasped firmly between her teeth, she sucked at it with an energy worthy of a better cause. She persevered, however, although her lips grew blistered, and her tongue and the roof of her mouth felt exactly as though they had been roasted. The joys of the evening lay not in the pleasures of nicotine but in the delights of being naughty.

This particular experiment was not repeated in St. Agnes' dormitory, because most of the girls found smoking so nasty, but from now onwards the general tone became more and more "worldly," and the conversations after "lights out" would have made the Mother Superior faint with horror if she could have heard them.

She did not hear them, however, and Rose left St. Ursula's with a record of exemplary conduct behind her. She wept bitterly at the thought of parting with her friends, and it was only the conviction that something *must* happen, now that she was growing up, which reconciled her at all to the thought of living all the year round at home.

Her principal excitement after leaving school was the putting up of her hair, about which she and her mother had almost a battle royal. Mrs.

Harford's ideal young woman was a meek Church worker called "Deaconess Anne"; Rose's ideal was "The Lady of Lowndes St.," and there was an obvious discrepancy between the two. The result, since both ideals were equally impossible of fulfilment, was a compromise with the balance strongly in Rose's favour. When she looked at herself with her abundant black hair waved becomingly over her forehead, Rose realized in a moment of exultation that she was pretty, and that men might even like her as much as Meriel Vernon's heroine had been liked. Her dark eyebrows made two long, narrow pencil lines across a pure white brow, her clear hazel eyes shone with animation and health, and the colour came and went deliciously in her fresh cheeks. The chin came to a point, indicating resolution, and this quality was also shown in the reserved lines of a mouth whose full lips might also, to a physiognomist, have suggested a strain of animalism. On the whole, it was a satisfactory picture which met her eyes when she gazed into the looking-glass, though in her discontent she did not realize that her prim clothes enhanced rather than concealed her beauty. Acute discontent warped her whole outlook at this time. She was discontented because her mother had refused to send her to Paris for a year to be "finished," like one or two of her school friends; she was discontented because she never saw any one except the Church

workers and missionaries with whom Mrs. Harford loved to associate; she was discontented with her brother, who might have made her life bearable if he had not been such a nincompoop. She was discontented with the part of London in which she lived, describing it to herself as "hopelessly suburban." She was discontented because her mother would not let her keep a dog; because she had not a bigger dress allowance; because no young men ever came to the house except curates, or James's friends, who were even worse. Of Adrian Corbet, the one boy friend of her youth, she now hardly ever heard. Great-aunt Louisa had not repeated her visit, and Adrian, who was still at Oxford, showed no signs of life. She felt she did not know him well enough to write to him.

Rose used to go for long walks by herself on Hampstead Heath, with her mind full of grievances, in a state of fierce revolt against the conditions of her life. "If only something exciting would happen!" she would say to herself sometimes, as she stood on the Spaniards' Road looking across the valley to Highgate, or gazed, from the top of Parliament Hill, over London's illimitable expanse of smoke-wreathed roofs and chimneys. It was agonizing to her to be so near and yet so far.

It was scarcely to be expected that a young girl as fresh and pretty as herself would have escaped the notice of neighbouring young men,

but Rose did not encourage the friendly glances which she encountered on the Heath. She had a strong natural primness. Caution and "respectability" were combined with her ardent nature; and though in a sense she was ready and anxious for the most highly coloured experiences, her calculating and eminently practical mind made her almost ultra-prudent.

The principal amusement at this time of her life was the reading of innumerable novels from the circulating library, which described either fashionable or Bohemian London—the unknown worlds of happiness, at whose gates her youth was knocking.

Mrs. Harford realized vaguely what was going on in Rose's mind, in spite of her daughter's secrecy, and deplored it. Rose still went regularly to church, and took a Sunday-school class for small girls, but she failed to devote herself to the service of Christ in the way for which Mrs. Harford had hoped and longed. When she was nearly twenty a change came over Rose's religious life which filled her mother with a fresh uneasiness which she hardly liked to admit even to herself. Rose at this time left off attending the "Mod-High" church to which she had gone for so many years, and began to visit the smaller church of St. Philemon's, situated in a poor neighbourhood of Camden Town. The Vicar of St. Philemon's was an elderly and corpulent priest, known to

his devoted parishioners as Father Martin. He was quite bald, had a large beaked nose resembling that of Savonarola, and bushy, black eyebrows under which shone two keen and humorous brown eyes which laughter was always puckering up and extinguishing. He looked like the most attractive kind of monk, and combined an all-embracing, all-accepting, occasionally lewd sense of humour with a piety as fierce as that of any mediæval saint. He was refreshing, enthusiastic, and genuine; and the services in his church were designed—as he himself put it—to be as full of colour and beauty as an elaborate ritual could make them. The most obscure of Popish pomps and ceremonies were indulged in rapturously at St. Philemon's, and the great drama of the Mass was celebrated there in such a way, that it took a place of paramount and overwhelming importance in the lives of all who attended. To Rose, the services at St. Philemon's, with their curious atmosphere of humanity, their variety and colour, came as a revelation. They awakened a keen response in her ardent and emotional nature. Some of the most ecstatic hours of her life were spent in the semi-darkness of the church in adoration of the figure of Christ crucified which loomed white and mysterious through the twilight, splashed with blood-red gleams from the seven sanctuary lamps.

Whenever she got an opportunity of helping

in the parish work she seized it, and by dint of throwing herself with energy into the tasks which Father Martin allotted to her, she came for a while to forget her discontents, her worldly aspirations, and the troubles of the flesh. Mrs. Harford would have been delighted at the change in her daughter if it had not been for the fact that she and Father Martin were unable to agree. The old priest, though she was forced to admit that he did "a wonderful work," seemed to her terribly flippant and "unwise," almost irreverent. These two were naturally anti-pathetic to one another, and while Father Martin regarded Mrs. Harford with a humorous and mocking eye, Mrs. Harford considered him to be a "good man working on wrong lines." He was so universally beloved and respected, however, and her own instinctive belief that the clergy could do no wrong was so strong in her, that it never occurred to her to seek to prevent Rose from going to St. Philemon's. On the contrary, out of a sense of duty, she encouraged her.

Rose became gradually a regular Church-worker, under the direction of some Sisters of Mercy who were attached to the parish. Her labours brought her into constant contact with Father Martin, with whom she became quite a favourite. He encouraged her to wear her pretty clothes and hats, almost carried on a flirtation with her in his cheerful human way, and tried his best to

correct the morbid tendencies of her nature, which were very apparent to him, and which he put down to her mother's influence. Sometimes he would take her for a stroll in the afternoon on Hampstead Heath—a surprising figure in his flowing *soutane* and beaver hat—and it was on one of these walks on a sultry July afternoon, a walk that she was long destined to remember, that he suddenly made an announcement which was to alter the whole course of her life.

“I've got some news for you, my dear,” he chuckled, as they struggled through the brambles in the direction of Golder's Hill. “I've got a friend of yours coming to stay in the parish and act as lay-reader. Later on he will be ordained and be my curate, I hope. He's very fresh from Welchester Theological College, and full of new dodges, I expect! Guess who he is.”

“A friend of mine!” faltered Rose. “Who on earth can it be? I haven't got any friends!”

“Nonsense!” laughed Father Martin. “He asked after you particularly. In fact, I think you were probably the attraction that decided him to come to me.”

Rose blushed charmingly, and she felt herself getting ridiculously excited.

“You don't mean my cousin, Adrian Corbet, surely?” she gasped.

“That's the boy,” said Father Martin. “He comes to me on Friday.”

CHAPTER VI

ADRIAN CORBET had been left an orphan when he was a child of five, and since that time he had lived with his great-aunt Louisa in her dilapidated Essex home, Old Compton Hall. She had looked after him with a vigilant but humorous severity, and had let him get into all the right kind of scrapes at Shrewsbury and in the holidays. She never talked to him about religion, and always let him see that he could please himself as to whether he went to church or not. And she had once given him a tip of half a sovereign for giving a village boy a black eye. The result of this sensible treatment was that religion and church-going, since they were never forced on him, early became attractive.

He had a natural tendency towards the Church, inherited from the pious, mild-eyed mother whom he could barely remember, who had been noted for her good works. His father had been a painter and something of a ne'er-do-well, and had run through all his money long before his death, so that Adrian owed everything to the masterful old woman who had so promptly taken charge of him. She ruled him—and her entire household—with an

iron hand, and had her moments of really terrifying severity, in which she would strike her nephew with anything that she happened to have handy. Her servants came in equally for her blows, and she had a habit of putting out her hand and grabbing the maids by the shoulder which was distinctly agitating. No one bore her any ill will, however, for these outbursts, and the affection, almost amounting to adoration, in which she was held by her whole household was a tribute to her real kindness, honesty, and humour.

She took a great interest in the most secret affairs of all her dependents, and her observation was almost uncanny in its keenness. Adrian admired his masterful old relative immensely, and had the greatest respect for her judgment, particularly in matters of conduct. She was a woman of the most virile tastes in all the arts, though she was inclined to look down on people who practised them, grouping them together in a menial class, like buffoons or mountebanks. In books she bowed to no decree of fashion. If she chanced to like a book by a notorious popular favourite, she would unblushingly assert this preference, however educated or advanced her listeners might be, for she was without a trace of intellectual snobbery. On the subject of religion she was curiously shy of making pronouncements, and kept her own counsel. She was never dogmatic, and made remarks on occasions which you would not have

expected from her—remarks which showed a curious imagination and much spiritual insight. She was a woman of whom it was particularly hard to predict what she would do or say in any given circumstances. Although an adept at “taking people down,” she very rarely abused her enemies behind their backs, or said half the spiteful things away from them that she said to their faces. One of the few occasions on which Adrian had heard his aunt be really vindictive was when they were driving away together after their visit to the Harfords on the occasion when he renewed his acquaintance with his cousin Rose.

“What an appalling humbug that woman is !” Aunt Louisa had said, with a bitterness which impressed Adrian because it was so unwonted. The visit had certainly not been either pleasant or successful, and he liked Mrs. Harford and James quite as little as did his aunt. He made an exception, however, in favour of his cousin Rose. She seemed so friendly and pretty, and he was also inclined to fancy himself as having made a conquest. He found himself thinking about her with odd frequency. Even at Oxford, amid the turmoil and excitement of his first term, he had not altogether forgotten her. But as he did not see anything of her in the vacation, his memories of her faded, especially as Oxford soon brought with it amorous adventures of a kind which he told himself were “the real thing.”

As a rowing man, Adrian began his University life in an athletic atmosphere. But after a while he drifted towards a set who made a point of displaying in their rooms volumes of the "Yellow Book," the poems of Ernest Dowson, and framed reproductions of Beardsley's drawings. They were terribly "artistic," but on the whole they were probably more interesting than either the athletes or the budding schoolmasters. Adrian at this time became "amazingly clever," and, as he imagined, amazingly complex. He looked with equal interest at every side of life: he was designedly cosmopolitan, and culled in a few short months dreams from the wisdom of all the ages. With every art, too, he acquired a tolerable familiarity. Since he was the son, not only of a painter but of a man of sound tastes, his natural instincts were usually trustworthy. He loved music and painting, and even more than these he loved letters, for he saw that in the art of writing alone lay his hope of self-expression. His principal friend at this time was a man called Guy Bridges, a tall youth with a sallow face and black hair. He had a nose like the beak of a bird, and large, dark eyes which twinkled with suppressed laughter. He had the knack of making extraordinarily clever caricatures of his friends, and he also suffered from a facility for doing drawings in the Beardsley manner, which earned him much applause. He had too keen a sense of humour, however, and too

much real talent to take the æsthetes seriously. He spent most of his time at the Taylorian and lived for the day when he would be able to begin work in Paris.

In his second year Adrian took a holiday from common sense and became "rather wonderful." Liqueurs in beautifully shaped bottles became his usual drink, and he and his friends would sit up all night and let the pale dawn caress their "avid" faces, aglow with "strange desires." It is true they had to pretend to be ill nearly every day in order to avoid keeping rollers, which rather marred the effect, but it was all very amusing, nevertheless. In summer they would spend mauve moments on the Upper Cherwell, singing absurd songs by Paul Marinier or some of Bruant's haunting "*actualités*." "Les Fleurs du Mal" and the "Fêtes Galantes" of Verlaine they also read to one another, but Mallarmé was, on the whole, not popular. He was so very difficult to understand, although certainly the mysterious flight of the beautiful suicide could communicate, after many glasses of Maraschino, a *frisson inconnu*.

Wilde, the great Victorian charlatan, had not in those days been exposed to the ordeal of a uniform edition, published at a popular price, and his work was still sought for with a certain excitement. Adrian rejoiced over his shelves, containing in all their unevenness of size and production a collection of his plays and poems. These, with two

volumes by Hubert Crackanthorpe, a complete set of "The Savoy," the poems of Mr. Arthur Symons, and a complete edition of the works of Walter Pater gave an æsthetic tinge to his book-case which was completed by a long line of French poetry and novels. Adrian himself wrote a volume of "purple" verse at this time, which, under the title of "Les Nuits Sataniques," had a great vogue among the "desperately wicked." It was understood that his college authorities (who had obtained a copy of the production, and nearly suffocated themselves with laughter over it in the Senior Common Room) "took a very serious view of the matter," and he daily expected to share the fate of Shelley and other distinguished sons of Alma Mater.

As he had some of the beginnings of a genuine gift, Adrian came to be in a sense a leader among the æsthetes. Naturally enough a club was started, and there were "strange" dinners in the private room at the Clarendon, where the members, with faces worn with marvelling at their own beauty, drank the cheaper champagnes, and recited poems of their own composition. It was sad that this praiseworthy effort to get into a Gallic vein was only successful when they were thoroughly *Champagnisés*. But what delicious moonshine it all was! "Serres Chaudes," "Blond Perfume of the Painted Girl," "Kohl-encircled Eyes," and wan pierrots baying at the moon, eloquent with a half-

humorous despair—little tags and phrases from the jargon of their particular pose stuck in Adrian's memory, in after years, and in retrospect acquired all the glamour which can cling to youthful folly. Letters in these days were written on immense sheets of hand-made paper with rough edges, and consisted of a line or two in French in one corner, with the address nearly off the sheet at the top. Envelopes were addressed carefully with the preposition "to" or "for," and hand-writing was meticulously ornamental. Clothes were sometimes more impressive than well cut, and silk shirts were—ah, how often!—green and mauve. Neo-Paganism, however, towards the end of Adrian's second year gave way to Neo-Catholicism, and the Narcissus Club went in force to Benediction at St. Aloysius', dressed elaborately in evening clothes with buttonholes of narcissi. And having thus issued, as it were, a challenge to Liddon House, Adrian sealed his own fate. After a while he found himself going for long walks to Headington and Shotover, on November afternoons, with charming priests, who, with their own undying enthusiasm, were able once again to fire his heart and call him back to his spiritual allegiance. These long walks through bracing days of autumn and winter, to Cumnor or to Boars' Hill, when the trees stood out naked and black, outlined with minuteness of detail against the colourless bright sky, when Oxford

lay below them bathed in a blue mist—factory chimneys, grey towers, and the strange aerial bubble of the Radcliffe all equally transfigured—were, in their austere way, more thrilling than any of the rather cheap amusements of the Narcissus Club. Monastic ideals, and the roses and raptures of an exquisite Catholicism filled Adrian's thoughts, and the religious life came to be painted in the eye of his imagination as the most wonderful of all possible lives. He would spend hours kneeling on the stone pavement in the windowless aisles of the church of the Cowley Fathers in the Iffley Road, in adoration before the great crucifix over the rood screen, which he could see between the pillars of the nave. He rejoiced in the stately ceremonial of the Mass at Cowley, and in the beautiful plain-song, so cold and "uncongregational," but so inspired with spiritual emotion. His boyish desire to be ordained—which had lapsed during the reign of the Narcissus Club—grew stronger than ever, and at this period he felt convinced that he had a call to the monastic life. He began now to go to church with a professional eye: he collected missals, volumes on the ceremonial use of incense and on the ritual of the Mass; he embarked on Patristic literature, beginning with the works of St. Chrysostom and St. Augustine; took an interest in people like Origen, Father Ignatius, St. Rose of Lima, Saints Francis of Assisi and of Sales, and in the monks of Caldey;

and would have enjoyed seeing a vision. The only thing that grated upon him about the services in church were the congregations, particularly the female part of them. His ideal was a monastery chapel to which the general public was not admitted.

At the time of his revived religious enthusiasm Adrian was faced with the necessity of working hard for the final honour school (he was reading Greats), for which, if he were to do himself justice, a sustained effort was imperative.

As most of his intimate friends went down at the end of his third year there seemed—luckily, perhaps—to be nothing to do except read. He experienced all the loneliness that comes to many fourth-year men who find themselves suddenly separated from the friends with whom they started their University life. He began to feel old, and the extravagances of his juniors annoyed him. Their behaviour seemed dull and witless compared with the radiant, riotous way in which he and his friends had played the fool, only a year or two ago ! Among all his friends, the one he missed most keenly was Guy Bridges. His friendship for Bridges had in no way relaxed during his development from an æsthete into a “pi.” Bridges laughed indulgently at both these exhibitions, and only loved Adrian the more because of them. He was a pure pagan with a very sweet, tolerant disposition—a nature as joyous and healthy

as the sunlight. He went down without taking a degree and hurried over to Paris, whence Adrian heard of him from time to time and gathered that he was living the usual student life and had started housekeeping with a particularly attractive *amie*, of whom he sent some charming charcoal sketches.

Adrian found life very tedious without Guy, but, left to himself, he succeeded in taking a second in Greats, which rather exceeded his expectations. The absence of Guy's sunny and in some ways demoralizing influence had a curious effect on him. He became almost morbidly serious and austere. Immediately after leaving Oxford, much to his aunt's irritation, he proceeded to Welchester Theological College in order to spend a year there before being ordained. "Damme, Adrian," Miss Corbet said to him one night over her glass of hot whisky-and-water, "you seem to have lost your sense of humour completely over this religion business. Not that you ever had a proper share for a Corbet ! I sincerely hope you will do something rash before very long ; please be sure to tell me all the details if you do. I have little to amuse me now. There is no life left in the men of your generation, Adrian. . . ." On this note of gloom Aunt Louisa departed for the night, but her nephew did not forget what she had said. The rash action, however, seemed a long while in coming.

At Welchester Adrian was happier even than he had expected. He enjoyed spending weeks under the shadow of one of England's most beautiful cathedrals. He was never troubled now by his old bugbear "congregations," and he had unlimited opportunities of revelling in the excitements of Catholic ceremonial. He quickly earned the reputation of being a "spike," and joined with gusto in all the arguments and altercations which split the college into groups. His chief aversion was that form of religion and water called "Mod.-High" by the Church newspapers ; and the celibacy of the clergy, the ceremonial use of incense, and the doctrine of Transubstantiation were his principal enthusiasms. Minor interests were the "Continental Sunday," Christian Socialism, and a belief in the superlative virtue of the Corps de Ballet.

Towards the end of his time at Welchester he made great friends with Father Martin, who was on a visit to the college, and accepted his invitation to go and live near him at Camden Town and work at St. Philemon's for some months before his ordination. It was then that he remembered Rose Harford, and discovered with interest that she attended St. Philemon's and was a friend of Father Martin's.

CHAPTER VII

ADRIAN did not like the appearance of the smug terrace facing the church which offered him "select apartments." He preferred to look farther afield, and eventually discovered what he wanted in one of the dignified if slightly dilapidated houses in Mornington Crescent. The sitting-room was lofty, with tall, sunny windows, and the bedroom at the back was comfortable and not unpleasant. His landlady, Mrs. Murphy, had an ingratiating Irish accent, and a kind of genius for hospitality, which made him smile all over his face with pleasure. She had been on the music-hall stage as a "song and dance act" before the demise of the regretted Murphy. Murphy had been an "acting manager," much beloved by the "professionals," she continued, adding that there was a Salomy dancer on the second floor, who was a perfect peach!

Mrs. Murphy stood in the doorway of his bedroom and made these disclosures while Adrian unpacked his missals and concordances, his copy of Mr. Percy Dearmer's "Parson's Handbook,"

and his varied collection of devotional works. He felt rather breathless, but it was all part of his elaborately arranged point of view not to be shocked by any of the things which religious people found shocking. He was pre-eminently "a liberal Catholic." He recalled this fact to himself when Mrs. Murphy suddenly turned her head round and said, "Ullo, Deerie; there you are at last!" to a lady on the stairs, who turned out to be Miss Cora Belmont, the Salomy dancer of the second floor.

"This is the gentleman what's taken the first floor, Deerie," Mrs. Murphy continued. "Mr. Corbet, 'is name is." Miss Belmont thereupon shook Mr. Corbet by the hand and said cheerily that she was "pleased to meet him." She was a simple and friendly young woman who worked extremely hard for her living, liked an occasional glass of stout or port wine, and was not above being made love to—"on the square, mind you!"—by a nice boy, now and then. She liked the looks of Adrian, and gave him a pleasant smile. Adrian found his preciousness wilting in this atmosphere of affability and good nature. Mrs. Murphy was one of those rich souls who radiate geniality. The most austere young monk would have melted before the raillery of those blue eyes and have felt a willingness to be folded—metaphorically, of course—to that capacious bosom.

She dismissed the dancer quickly, after the

introduction had been effected, and went off to get her new lodger his tea and to make other preparations for his comfort. After the meal Corbet went round to pay his respects to his Vicar, and as it was nearly time for Evensong, he accompanied Father Martin to the church. During the service he found himself examining the scanty congregation from his place in the chancel. Only the innermost circle of the faithful came on weekdays, and they seemed to be mostly single women of uncertain age, who yearned. The exception was a tall, handsome girl, dressed quietly in a blue coat and skirt, who looked remarkably like his half-forgotten cousin Rose. When the service was over, as he was leaving the church with Father Martin, she came up to them. "How do you do?" she said, holding out her hand, after she had greeted his companion. "We've met before, I think—years ago!" They looked at one another with smiling interest, and Corbet told her how pleased he was to see her again. "Mother hopes you will come and dine with us on Monday evening," Rose said as she prepared to depart. "Half-past seven dinner." Adrian accepted with pleasure, but before he had time to explore his pretty cousin any further, she had smiled "good-bye" and hurried away.

When Corbet presented himself at the front door of "St. Chad's" on the appointed day, he experienced a curious chill. The maid who opened

the door to him seemed oddly forbidding, and even in Mrs. Harford's welcome there was a note of suspicion underlying her affability. He did not like what he remembered of her, and now that he saw her again he liked her still less, and with youthful intolerance failed to see the fine qualities which formed the counterpart of her defects.

At dinner they were a *partie carrée*. The table was square, and lighted by an unmitigated electric candelabra, which spared no one in its searching brilliance. Rose sat opposite Corbet and Mrs. Harford and James graced the two ends of the table. The conversation during the meal consisted almost exclusively of religious "shop," a fact which exasperated Adrian almost beyond bearing. His glance wandered nervously round the room, from the engravings after Landseer and the mahogany sideboard to the magenta curtains, and finally retreated from James's smug face and little black moustache to rest on Rose. He thought what a fresh flower she looked, in those depressing surroundings, and wished he could get an opportunity of talking to her alone. He watched her eating bread in between the courses—quickly putting small pieces into her mouth with her small, pink fingers. It was not a particularly elegant occupation, but she managed to do it with the charm of a squirrel eating nuts. Her expression was very demure, and whenever she spoke it was to

say something about her Sunday-school classes, or about Sister Mary Veronica, under whom she worked.

“Which do you think is the best game to encourage in a Boys’ Club,” she asked Corbet—
“draughts or bagatelle?”

He confessed, with some sinking at the heart, that he preferred boxing to either.

“Personally, I think boxing only tends to make the boys rougher than they are already,” remarked Mrs. Harford. “I don’t approve of such violent games, but I suppose Father Martin knows best what is required for his parish.”

This was a concession due, perhaps, rather to a sharp look from Rose, who had been known to show an undutiful critical faculty, than to any feeling that the truth must at all costs be admitted. She did not, in fact, wholly believe it, and had occasionally given Father Martin what she considered most valuable advice.

“I wish he would not wear those fiddle-back chasubles,” she went on querulously. “They are so un-English! That is the worst of Father Martin. He really does give a handle to the Kensitites in some of the things he goes in for, and indeed in his general attitude. He is not exactly flippant, but he never seems to me to maintain that tradition of really reverent ritual which has been handed down in the English Church. My dear husband was always so digni-

fied, and he made his services dignified. I suppose that has spoilt me for the more modern way."

Adrian remembered with a flash of amusement that Aunt Louisa had said that Edmund Harford always spoke as if he had plums in his mouth, and refrained with difficulty from smiling.

The silence was broken by James, who reverted to the subject of games for boys. He expressed himself as being strongly in favour of bagatelle. A suspicion of vanity was noticeable in his satisfaction at having shown a profit in the running of his Boys' Club by making the urchins pay up a penny a game for the use of the table, a practice which he said prevented "pauperization." He then discoursed with great acumen on the finances of Coal Clubs and Bands of Hope, until Adrian began to wonder whether he were at a dinner-table or at a vestry meeting. In all these matters both Mrs. Harford and James looked up to him as an authority, and he felt rather ashamed of himself for not entering more wholeheartedly into their enthusiasms. As a candidate for Holy Orders he felt that more was required of him than he was able to give. There was nothing in this talk of clubs and games which recalled the spiritual exaltations of Welchester. He felt out of sympathy with the whole outlook and ideas of this family, which had concluded so much as a matter of course that in such matters

he was "one of us." Looking at Rose's demure face as she peeled an apple, he wondered whether some gleam of sympathetic understanding might be sought for in that quarter ; but every word the girl said made his hopes sink lower. She was apparently completely absorbed in such surface matters as Sunday-school treats, Church work (that almost dismal-sounding phrase), and functions at which clergy and "laity" f orgathered. And yet he could not help speculating whether at the back of those limpid hazel eyes there might not be a soul with something human and unpretentious about it. The atmosphere of this house seemed to suffocate him.

There was no wine, and James did not smoke, so that Adrian's wonderings took a despondent turn. As nobody played the piano the party went, much to his delight, and sat in the garden. It was a perfect evening. The moonlight made the trees and flowers mysterious, and cast strange shadows over the lawn. Mrs. Harford very soon complained of the chilliness of the breeze, and went in. James excused himself also, and Rose and her cousin were left alone. They sat on garden seats for a while without speaking. Adrian was doubtful as to how best to begin the attack. There was something forbidding about that bent dark head and the demure expression on his cousin's lips.

"Are you fond of pictures?" he asked, with the enthusiasm of an angler trying a new bait.

This time there seemed more hope. "Yes, very," she answered on an eager contralto note, quite unlike the tones she used for Sunday Schools. "I always go to the Academy, every year, with Mother. Did you see it this year?"

Adrian's heart sank again. This was worse than ever! He pricked up his ears, however, when his cousin began to complain of the dreariness of her life. "Of course, I'm very fond of the Church work," she said, "and interested in my class, and all that. But it's horribly monotonous. Nothing ever happens here. I used to think I should die or go mad if some one didn't take me to the play, or take me about to see things. I'm getting over that now, more or less. All the same, it's dull. Nothing *ever* happens," she repeated miserably.

Corbet lit a cigarette and looked at her with a revived interest. After what he had seen and heard at the dinner-table, her remarks seemed to show him, as in a flash, the emptiness of her life.

"It must be awfully boring for you," he said sympathetically, putting his hand on hers in a gesture of friendship. "We must see if we can't have some fun together."

She looked up at him half-suspiciously, and he guessed that she was thinking that it was not "quite nice" for a lay-reader to talk like that! He felt inclined to kick something violently, but

instead he got up to return to the house and take his departure.

The wind had dropped, and there was hardly a breath of air to stir the sleeping roses. The violet-blue sky was ablaze with stars, and the moon was transfiguring everything and making the lines of roofs and branches stand out in dark relief. As they walked along the pathway towards the house, the light scarf which Rose wore round her shoulders caught in a bush and fell to the ground. They both stooped, simultaneously, to pick it up and Corbet found himself suddenly grasping Rose's warm fingers. They did not speak again, but as he was shaking hands in the drawing-room, he looked into her demure face and wondered if she could possibly have done it on purpose.

CHAPTER VIII

ADRIAN CORBET started his work at St. Philemon's on fire with an enthusiasm which he would not have believed could possibly grow dim. He threw himself at once into all the parish activities, worked from morning till night among the poor, started a club for boys, and even inaugurated "muscular Christian" boxing contests in a disused tin tabernacle which he purchased second-hand with Aunt Louisa's help. He privately loathed all that "muscular Christianity" connoted—in spite of his own six feet of splendid bodily vigour—but he rejoiced at having this opportunity of mortifying himself in his Master's service. He welcomed all the difficulties which he encountered because they gave him a chance of showing his zeal by overcoming them.

But as the weeks went by and Adrian settled down to the routine of what was to be his profession in life, he came, by almost imperceptible stages, to realize that there were all kinds of trials to be endured which he had never anticipated. They were trials which made him irritated with himself, disappointed and perplexed. The fact that

he could let himself, for instance, be annoyed beyond endurance by the female Church-workers with whom he came in daily contact filled him with inward dismay. And matters did not improve, but rather grew worse. His dislike of them, struggle with himself as he might, only increased. He told himself repeatedly what good women they really were, and yet, somehow, they had the knack of rousing all that was worst in his character. He had never liked "congregations" at any time, but he had no idea that Church "shop" and the tea-time prattle of pious spinsters could prove so exasperating. By constantly worrying over his attitude towards the excellent Miss Harris and her friends, and even towards Mrs. Harford, Adrian found that the whole matter gradually got on his nerves, spoilt all his happiness in his work, and filled him with a miserable self-distrust. In hardly more than three months' time he succeeded in working himself into a morbid state of melancholy. If these trifles disturbed him so completely in a parish which had a man like Father Martin at the head of it, what, he bitterly reflected, would it be like when he went to work in other parishes? How different life in London was proving from the life of spiritual exaltation which he had lived at Welchester, under the inspiring shadow of the great cathedral ! . . .

At the moment of Adrian's deepest dejection another horror which he fondly imagined he had

scotched for ever, began again to raise its head. At Welchester he had suffered at intervals from the painful physical desires natural to youth. There had been times when his mind had been filled with intoxicating visions, of the kind associated with St. Anthony, but he had fought with himself and had overcome them until they had almost ceased to trouble him. Now, however, thrown in upon himself as he was by his lonely life, the old temptations reappeared, with even greater violence than before.

To counteract the depression by which he had come to be afflicted, he began to relax the vigour of his efforts in the parish and grew to welcome diversions that would distract his thoughts, such as a surreptitious visit to a *matinée* with Rose, or a chat with his racy Irish landlady, or even with his fellow-lodger, the "Salomy" dancer. There was something specially soothing about the "second floor." Miss Cora Belmont was a direct, simple-hearted person, devoid of vanity or humbug, preserving amid all the moral griminess of life on the "'alls" the heart of a jolly girl. She had a Cockney cheeriness and good-humour which—preserved in times of adversity—made her seem almost heroic.

The beginning of their friendship was characteristic. She passed him on the stairs about a week after he had installed himself in Mrs. Murphy's house, just as he was going up to eat his luncheon,

but paused when she noticed his air of depression. "Wot's up, old gimlet face?" she inquired, in accents of solicitude. "Wotcher looking like a graveyard about?"

Adrian remarked that he was feeling rather tired and rather hungry.

"Lord, so'm I!" said Cora fervently. "I was just going out to get some stout and some bread and cheese. If you've got some grub in your place I'll take a bite off you, old dear. I've been working all the morning like a black', doing breakdowns. There ain't no money in the Salomy stunt nowadays. The B.P. is fed up with it, I guess. Look' at this, though!" Cora proceeded to kick Adrian's light furniture into various corners of his room, and with hands on hips and head thrown back started showing off the new steps. Afterwards the stout and cheese made their appearance, and Adrian enjoyed his luncheon.

"I wish you'd come and run our guild for girls, Cora," he said. "It would make all the difference if somebody like you would come along and help."

To his surprise she took him quite seriously. "I'll come," she said, "one of these days. I'd rather like it. I love church and hymns and all that, you wouldn't believe!"

"Well, I only wish the congregations were made up of your sort, I can tell you," he said fervently.

"Garn!" said Cora. "Church isn't really no

place for the likes of me. You parson blokes don't know what's good and what's bad. It's always the parsons what are hard on poor girls who are down on their uppers, and hungry, and make a mess of things ! Often they're a fat lot better than many of the devil-dodgers, even if they do go to Brighton for a week-end. You should see what I've seen—in the profesh ! No offence, matey ! ” Cora added with a smile as she swallowed her stout and left him. Adrian did not take any. But as he looked at her kind, vulgar, careworn, yet courageous face, and returned her smile, he felt rising up in him, anew, a bitter feeling of discontent, dissatisfaction, bewilderment—a fresh suspicion of the unkind “good.”

After Cora had broken the ice, Adrian used often to ask her to share his luncheon or tea with him, and listened to her interminable stories about the 'alls with a degree of interested attention which he despaired of being able to give to the Band of Hope. His conversations with her made it harder than ever for him to conceal from himself how parish work bored him. Instead of growing used to it, he only found it more and more irksome.

There were days when the idea of his approaching ordination filled him with dismay, and he permitted himself the thought that perhaps he might have made a terrible mistake in the choice of his vocation. There were other times when the flame of his devotion revived, and he thought

of leaving parish work and joining some monastery as a postulant. But just when he was on the point of spurring himself to take action, to go to talk to Father Martin about it, his mood would change again. He would open his tall window and into the room would come the summer breeze, bringing with it the infinitely inviting rumour of London—caressing, insinuating—and the blood would rush through his veins, urging him to live life to the full. London, at those times, appeared like a radiant woman opening her arms to his embraces, while his profession dragged him away from her by the coat-tails. The world seemed to him to be full of beauty, on which his religion urged him, regretfully, to turn his back.

If it had not been for the immense sanity of Father Martin's outlook, Adrian would probably have found things even harder than they were. Father Martin, to a large extent, shared his lay-reader's feelings about congregations, and his opinion of his own was far from complimentary. "I've been here for ten years," he remarked to Corbet one Sunday morning, taking a large pinch of snuff and blowing his nose on a scarlet workman's handkerchief, "and I'm no nearer piercing their thick hides than I was when I started. I make remarks to them from the pulpit that would raise emotions of wrath in a hippopotamus, but all they do is to smile affably and say it's just my humorous way. . . . Sometimes," he went on, "I

really feel like clearing out the whole crowd of them and getting in a few decent burglars and prostitutes. Our present lot are altogether too well-off and respectable."

The old priest's laughing exaggerations, however, did not prevent Adrian from perceiving the humility and devoted enthusiasm underlying them, which had enabled him to work without intermission year after year. There was something noble and sincere, deep down in the old man's heart, as in the heart of all good priests, which enabled him cheerfully to put up with the petty irritations which were proving too much for Corbet. It was this "something" which Adrian was forced to realize, in agony of mind, that he lacked.

As Adrian got used to living in London his need for some mental outlet from the parish became almost unendurable. Although there were a number of men whom he had known living within reach of him, he had not looked any of them up since he had been working with Father Martin, for his year at Welchester had widened the gap between him and his old circle of friends. And his growing sense of failure in the religious life made him avoid the newer friends whom he had made at Welchester. Guy Bridges he had not heard from for months, and he concluded he was still in Paris. He was thrown for companionship, therefore, on Rose, who—when her freshness and

beauty did not happen to have gone to his head—seemed to him to have a commonplace mind and an unpleasant, deceitful nature ; and on Mrs. Murphy and Cora Belmont, whom he could only bear in small instalments.

Gradually his inherited love of pictures began to reassert itself, and, as a result, the centre of interest for him began to shift with horrible rapidity. London had so much to offer ! To one who was as fond of Art as Corbet the London collections made, in themselves, an absorbing study. And, apart from this, there was his old fondness for books, for the play, for music. It was as though flood-gates in his mind were being gradually lifted, and the interests which formed part of his permanent make-up swept everything in front of them. He felt himself drifting helplessly away from his old ideals, though the process was so insidious that he could never tell exactly where he was, for the great increase of happiness which his wider life brought him made the parish work seem, curiously enough, more endurable.

As he got more and more into the habit of spending lonely and blissful hours in picture-galleries and theatres, there opened to him, suddenly, the great adventure of discovering London. When August came and the nights grew too close for theatres and music-halls to be pleasant, he formed the practice of dining early and afterwards going on the top of a motor-bus to Marble Arch,

and thence to strange suburbs incredibly remote and unexpected, inhabited by people unlike any whom he had ever seen before. He would let himself be deposited at Lewisham or Plumstead or East West Ham with as much delight as if he were getting off the boat at Calais. Particularly he loved to haunt the riverside below the Tower Bridge, and he became familiar with Wapping and Rotherhithe, Bermondsey, Deptford, and, above all, with Greenwich, which seemed to him one of the most romantic and beautiful places on which he had ever set eyes. It was always an excitement to him to feel that he was surrounded on all sides, for miles and miles, by eager human beings with passions, hopes, and aspirations like his own. There was something delicious but disturbing to him in the warm evening air, in the bright lights, in the glitter of the streets, and the dark coolness of the parks, with their hundreds of 'enlaced lovers. His youth fought with his religion, for recognition.

On a particularly lovely evening towards the end of September, when the green lights of sunset were lingering in the sky and the first faint stars appearing above the roofs, he was just starting out for one of his evening expeditions when he met Cora Belmont going upstairs. It was his turn now to rally her for looking miserable. The corners of her humorous mouth drooped, and her dark eyes looked heavy and dull. She was dressed

for walking, in a very quiet and well-cut blue coat and skirt and a simple black hat, and looked, to Adrian's eyes, curiously refined. He had almost expected her to wear "fevvers" like a coster-girl, from the way she talked.

"Down in the dumps!" she echoed in response to Adrian's query. "So would you be if you'd been sold a stinker, like what I have. The agent, 'e told me for sure I was to open on Monday at the Kilburn Pavilion for a fortnight, two 'ouses a night and three quid a week. I went to 'im to-day for to sign the contract and it's all my eye. Now I ain't got nothing till I go north touring with Lewison's! I'm just about damn-sick of resting, Adrian. It's so dull. All my pals are away at the seaside, pierrots and all that. . . ."

The ends of her mouth drooped again in trying to be cheery, and Corbet felt genuinely distressed. "You want bucking up, Cora," he said. "What can we do?"

"'We?'" said Cora kindly. "Why, all the other devil-dodgers would see you, my boy. You'd get into trouble with the old tabbies if you took me on the spree. Do you think I don't know that? I'd have come with you weeks ago, otherwise."

Adrian felt himself blushing. What she said was true enough, but she had roused in him a feeling of recklessness. What harm could there be in taking this brave little girl for a walk on Hampstead Heath? The tabbies, indeed!

He took her hand and she followed him back into his sitting-room.

“That’s all rot !” he said. “I don’t care a rap if all the clergy in London see us ! I feel frightfully dull and lonely. It would be kind of you to come with me. Let us go up on to the Heath for a bit, and then go back into London for some supper. . . . Do come !”

Cora looked at him with shining eyes, and without answer ran upstairs. Adrian followed her, wondering. The door of her room was open and she called to him to come in. “I’ll be ready in a jiffy,” she cried, “but I wasn’t decent to come out like that. I’ve got a better hat in that cupboard—open it and ’ave a look—and me ’ands wanted washing.” Adrian sat on her bed while she completed her toilet, and carefully powdered her nose and forehead. She was a pretty girl, though rather inclined to be flat-chested, and she looked her best in the long skirt which hid her legs, that were too muscular to be beautiful. She had abundant fair hair, and fine eyes, and her mouth wore an expression of friendliness and animation which made her immediately attractive.

She took a childish delight in showing Corbet her possessions before they started. The album of press cuttings, containing notices from obscure provincial newspapers describing her “refined and æsthetic dance-act” was the principal treasure, and she took its contents with extreme seriousness.

“My pal wot’s on the mantel-piece there,” she said, pointing to a photograph of a young and pert-looking comedian with oily hair and dishonest eyes, “’e always says I ought to be a star-turn, like Maud Allan and some o’ these Russian blokes, and that I *should* be—if the public weren’t such fools.” Adrian thought the comedian’s eyes looked more dishonest than ever.

When the treasures had been admired, they took the tube to Hampstead and walked up Holly Hill, till, by climbing a flight of steps they came to some seats, under a row of tall elms, from which they obtained a wide view over the Heath towards Finchley and Golder’s Green. A fringe of street lamps stretching away on the right-hand side indicated the Spaniards’ Road. In front of them, on the horizon, golden lights flickered and gleamed. There was a distant bluish-white glare also which threw up round it immense shadows—the station at Golder’s Green. At their feet was the wild and untidy grass slope leading down to the tangle of trees and underwood so dear to generations of lovers.

The evening was warm but slightly damp, and though the stars were blazing overhead, the wreaths of mist which hung about the trees lent the air a flavour of autumn, delicate and disturbing.

A vague murmuring impinged on their ears, which might have been composed of a multitude of whisperings. The voices that came filtering

through the night were like a caress in their soft tones. Far away a singer with a banjo could be heard, his music sounding pleasantly, softened by the distance. It was easy to divine that the darkness held innumerable lovers ; hard to insist that here, under the moon, passion, with its *humanity* and pathos, could be dismissed as entirely, utterly gross.

The trees under which they were sitting seemed preternaturally tall, motionless, and solemn, and they, too, sheltered lovers who sat beneath them dreaming and immobile. Adrian and Cora could see them on either side—dark, clasped figures, shamed to silence by the night's all-enveloping wings. Instinctively Adrian's hand sought his companion's. She held it in both her hands, her shoulder pressed caressingly against his, and she turned her face towards him with a smile of tenderness in her eyes. His arm quickly and passionately enlaced her, and his lips pressed hers in a kiss which startled and horrified him by its fierceness. His youth paid its tribute to all women in that hungry, almost brutal caress. His brain was in confusion. He was intoxicated by the touch of her warm lips, by the feel of her cheek against his, of the quivering, yielding body which his arm encircled.

After a while he tore himself away from her, and she watched him with curiosity as they walked towards the flagstaff. She wondered

if he were angry with her. The waters of the pond by Jack Straw's Castle shone like quicksilver in the moonlight. Crossing the road, they stood for a little while leaning over the railings, looking down across the valley towards Highgate. A myriad lights gleamed on all sides, and there were dark shadows immediately beneath them, cast by the silent trees. Parliament Hill looked like a little island rising from a dark sea, crowded with tiny black figures outlined against the bright glare in the sky. Beyond it, thousands of lights indicated wide expanses of industrial London, districts inhabited by minute, ant-like, untiring people.

Over those railings lay a world transfigured : it was the meeting-place between realism and romance, fairyland and a terrible actuality. No one looking at this view on an autumn night could ever be too certain that two and two made four, that a thing was necessarily what it seemed, or that human life was susceptible to arrangement, and was anything but an impenetrable mystery, to lighten which, beauty, in all its myriad forms, was the only ultimate revelation.

"Gosh ! it's lovely, ain't it?" said Cora with a quaver in her voice. "I should 'a died o' moping if you hadn't taken me out. You're 'a decent kid."

Adrian was trembling with excitement, and did not answer her for a moment. Then he suggested

their going to the Trocadero for some supper ; but Cora, to his surprise, shook her head.

“ No, that would spoil it all,” she said. “ Don’t let’s do that. Let’s buy our own supper and go back ’ome and eat it. I know where we can get some lovely port—and I can smoke. It will be much more fun, and we needn’t hurry back.”

Corbet felt that things were too strong for him. He could think of nothing but a desire to kiss Cora again and again, to hold her in his arms. His throat grew dry, his limbs shook . . .

Cora superintended the purchase of the supper. She seemed to know exactly what to get and where to get it cheapest, and Adrian’s arms were filled with packages by the time they reached Mornington Crescent. Mrs. Murphy had gone to bed, but Cora foraged in the kitchen for knives and forks and had the table laid in what seemed a miraculously short space of time. Her sense of “ having a good time while you’re about it ” infected Adrian. For Cora this evening was evidently what she would have called a “ beano ” : a thing to be indulged in at rare intervals, but to be enjoyed to the utmost when the opportunity presented itself.

After supper they took their glasses and cigarettes and sat on Adrian’s sofa by the open window. Cora had taken off her coat and hat, and as she sat in her thin, almost transparent white blouse, her arms bare from the elbow, there was something curiously pathetic and childlike about her pretti-

ness. Adrian did not trust himself to look at her at first, and thinking that he must be annoyed she put her arm round his shoulder and smiled at him affectionately. He turned round and caught her roughly in his arms.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Adrian woke up on the following morning he felt as he might have done on the morning of his execution. His head ached, and his throat was dry ; he felt soiled inside and out, disgraced, humiliated. His own folly and weakness had now made his decision to give up the idea of taking Orders inevitable. And then there was Cora. What was he to do with this poor girl whom he had led astray? He turned over a thousand plans in his mind as he looked mournfully out of his bedroom window on to the grimy houses at the back. The roofs were dripping with moisture ; a heavy, unending rain was falling. It looked as though it would rain for ever ; the sun was dead !

Should he ask Cora to marry him, and devote his life to trying to make her happy? It struck him that this would be the chivalrous thing to do. But perhaps Cora would nobly refuse : she was so generous. In that case he would have to think of some other way of doing his duty by her.

Then there was his interview with Father Martin to think of. Should he confess his reasons for

going away, for giving up his ideas of Ordination? He could not decide. Besides, his reasons were so complicated, and they could not all be put down to last night's escapade. And then there were the Harfords to be considered. The thought of Rose, so pure and unsullied, made a fresh flood of shame come over him. How would he be able to face her now?

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He was on the point of getting up and pouring out his bath water when a knock came at his door, and a fair head appeared round it. It was Cora, in an extremely scanty dressing-gown over a still scantier shift. Adrian grew a deep purple at the sight of her, and his embarrassment increased when he noticed the radiantly happy expression on her face. She held a letter in her hand.

"I say, Adrian, 'ere's news," she said, sitting down on his bed, and crossing her too-muscular legs. "My young men, 'im that you saw on the mantel-piece last night, 'e wants me to join 'im at Blackpool; sent me the fare and all. Look!" She displayed some postal-orders. "I always thought you'd bring me luck."

"Cora," Adrian stammered, "what a cad you must think me! Will you ever forgive me?"

Cora's look of happiness left her immediately. She looked frankly bewildered. "Forgive you,"

she echoed. "Why, what on earth for? Because you gave me a good time last night? What the 'ell d'you mean?" She looked at him for a long while, trying to read his thoughts, and he wished he had not spoken.

"Oh, I know," she said at last. "S'pose you want to marry me, or give me fourpence for me blighted life, and all that. Never 'eard o' 'nowadays,' I suppose. Girls 'ave grown up some since you was born, Adrian. I'm not ashamed of *myself* . . . I suppose it's all along o' this devil-dodging. . . . I wouldn't 'ave gone out with you if I 'adn't liked you. And why shouldn't I 'ave a bit o' fun now and again. Don't I work for it? It's them as don't work and sponge on the fellows what are the wrong uns: and even they can't 'elp it, often as not."

"But your pal, Cora," stuttered Adrian in dismay. "It isn't fair to him."

Cora's face became black with anger. "My Gawd, what conceit!" she cried. "Do you mean to tell me that Bill, what I've known for donkey's years, is going to upset 'imself because I've 'ad a bit of fun with a chap I've known for a few weeks? You dodgers are simply up the pole, that's what you are. The likes of me are good and bad, same as the likes of you, but, thank God, we aren't such bloody fools!"

Adrian felt scalded into a certain manliness. He said nothing, but the morbid horrors with

which he woke began to disappear. Cora was not moral, but she certainly had her own code. The trouble was that it did not happen to be the one he had been engaged in teaching. After all, it was just his old points of view that he was abandoning. He would abandon them altogether. Cora was, perhaps, as near being right as the *Church News*. She opened up other worlds than his.

“There; don’t let’s ’ave a row, Deerie,” Cora said, leaning down and kissing him. “It’s been so lovely!” Her loose, fair hair fell on him, caressingly.

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His mood changed when he had seen Cora off by a midday express. He felt, now that his decision was taken, curiously invigorated and careless. He wanted to do something effective to show his emancipation. But the thought that in a day or two he would have to face the keen brown eyes of Father Martin and announce his defection from the Church, his inability to take Orders, sobered him. It was difficult to conceal things from Father Martin, he had an uncanny touch of clairvoyance. Bluster didn’t go down in that quarter; one had to be one’s sorry self.

After lunch, more from force of habit and lack of any other companionship than from any

stronger reason, he walked up to "St. Chad's" to take Rose for a stroll on the Heath. He was beginning to recover from his mood of self-abnegation, of shame. Cora had somehow laughed it out of him. He felt sane and rebellious, and curiously "emancipated." He noticed that the girls he met smiled at him demurely, and wondered what had happened to alter him in their eyes.

His feeling almost of complacency abruptly deserted him as soon as he reached his destination. Mrs. Harford met him in the hall and froze him with a disapproval that seemed more marked than ever, and alarmed his nervous conscience.

"I thought your mother seemed a bit peevish with me just now," he remarked to Rose as they strolled up the hill.

"Oh, Miss Harris has just been in," Rose replied. "She always adds tinder to the fire of mother's disapprovals!"

Adrian reflected that the old cat must have seen him with Cora, and observed a resentful silence for a minute or two. But his anger left him, and he felt curiously sentimental when Rose put her gloved hand for a moment on his arm, with a movement that was like a caress. Her hazel eyes had a soft glow in them, which he took for sympathy.

They had reached the Flagstaff now and stood for a moment looking down over the valley, stretched out before them, with the red roofs of

the new garden suburb glowing in the middle distance, and the sunlight shimmering on the roof of the Tube railway-station and glittering on a far off corner of the "Welsh Harp."

"Do you know, Rose," Corbet remarked in a sudden burst of confidence, "I have almost come to the conclusion that it's no use my taking Orders. I should never make a good parish priest. . . . I'm thinking of leaving Father Martin, and giving up this work for something else. If I stay on, I ought to be ordained this Advent, so you see I've got to make up my mind definitely within the next few weeks. . . ."

"Oh, Adrian!" said Rose, in shocked accents. She was horrified at his confession. Though ready for any adventure, for any imprudence perhaps, she could not free herself from the shackles which had fettered her mind all her life.

Corbet looked at her in surprise. "It's just you religious people who make things so hard," he went on. "You won't let a parson be a human being. Besides, I've been a hopeless failure in the parish—and in other ways."

"What nonsense!" said Rose. "Every one says you are a tremendous success with the boys. Father Martin was telling mother only the other day how much they liked you."

"Oh, the boys!" he moodily objected. "Being a priest isn't only just boxing with young hooligans in a club-room. There is the necessity of absolute

faith in what one preaches to be considered. And then it means giving up things which one knows and feels are good. And one has to be so intolerant to believe that Christianity is the only religion with any truth in it at all."

"I don't think you realize what you are saying!" Rose remarked in crushing tones. She often forgot to say her prayers, particularly when she was reading a new book in bed by the author of "The Lady of Lowndes St.," but the idea of "not believing" in Christianity was horrifying to her. It outraged her strong sense of respectability. "Surely, Adrian, you haven't lost your faith?" she added. She put the question with wide eyes.

"Would you mind if I had?" he replied.

"Of course I should mind. I should think it very wrong of you."

"Wrong of me!" he cried, his face suddenly flushing with anger. "So you would criticize and condemn at once, automatically! It is you 'religiose' people, with your cocksure certainty about everything under the sun and your eagerness to condemn before you understand, who make one lose faith and lose heart. Do you think a man on the point of being ordained would disbelieve just for the fun of the thing? Don't you think it would be much more comfortable to go along, happy and contented, one of the 'saved'—swaggering about in a state of grace, trying to improve one's neighbours?"

He spoke with a bitterness she had never observed in him before, and it made her wince.

"If you are going to say horrid things like that I shall go home," she said in injured tones, hardening her eyes, and half turning her back to him. She lifted her head, with irritating self-possession, in an attitude of disapproval. It occurred to Adrian, irrelevantly, that she looked extraordinarily pretty, and he became rather ashamed of his outburst. After all, she was only a child, and could not be expected to have broken free from the influence of her home.

"I'm sorry, Rose," he said, in a caressing voice.

He put his arm through hers, and laughed at her, as much as to say, "Let's be friends again." They had now reached the westernmost and wildest extremity of the Heath, in a spot where a group of tall chestnut-trees made a grateful shade. They sat down to rest for a while on a sheltered seat underneath them.

Rose looked up at him demurely, and put her hand lightly on his knee: "Don't be such a silly boy!" she said gently. He realized in a flash that he could kiss her if he wanted to. It was an emotional moment. He did not know afterwards what it was that prevented him from kissing her, unless it was a feeling of unworthiness so soon after his experience with Cora, or a vague uneasiness at the incongruity between her acts and the hidebound things she said.

Mysterious woman ! The puzzle of Rose's complex nature was insoluble to him. As they walked back across the Heath towards home, she actually began discussing Meriel Vernon's latest novel, and reminded him of his having spoken to her years and years ago about "The Lady of Lowndes St." So this little prude, horrified at him for giving up his idea of taking Orders, had revelled in "The Lady of Lowndes St." as a baby of sixteen ! He gave up the problem altogether.

When they neared "St. Chad's," she asked him rather timidly to come in to tea. They both looked at one another and laughed, as Corbet declined. As he walked home he was occupied almost as much with the problem of Rose's character as with self-contempt for his weakness in the face of temptation, and for the relinquishment of his ideals. But weren't ideals rather "young" and falutin, anyway?

CHAPTER X

THE stars in their courses seemed to be fighting against Corbet in his struggle to preserve his religious convictions. On the day after he had said good-bye to Cora Belmont a letter arrived from Guy Bridges, forwarded to him from Old Compton Hall. Dear old Guy! The sight of the familiar handwriting was enough to arouse in him an extraordinary revulsion of feeling against his own restricted outlook. He wanted to break through and trample on the points of view, the habits of mind in which he was, so to speak, enmeshed, to break free until he could stand where Guy stood.

MY DEAR ADRIAN (the letter began, headed with an address in Fitzroy Street),—I am back in London now for good, and should like to see you again most awfully. As you haven't given me an address for ages I am sending this to Old Compton Hall. If you are in London do write and say when you will come and dine. If you are in the country, come up for a week-end, or a week, or for ever.

Yours always,

GUY.

Adrian felt more moved by this letter from his old friend than he would have thought possible.

Guy represented the point of view towards life which was most natural and sympathetic to him. The ideals of Welchester, he had ruefully to acknowledge now, were little more than a pose in which he had been ultra-conscientious. Guy's letter had reached him by a midday post, and very soon after receiving it he made his way to Fitzroy Street. He was as excited at the thought of meeting Bridges again as a girl might be at the thought of meeting a lover. He recalled the good times they had had together. Guy had always been the most careless pagan in the world. He had loved the good things of life and the beautiful things, and had never had any ecclesiastical enthusiasms. . . .

All the way, on the motor-bus or walking, he was thinking of what they would have to say to each other. Adrian had never been to the neighbourhood of Fitzroy Square before, and had some difficulty in finding his way. His first impressions as he turned out of the Tottenham Court Road—most detestable of thoroughfares—into a street of decayed tenement houses, were anything but favourable. The legend "*Chambres Meublées à louer*," which he saw over many of the doorways appealed to his cosmopolitan instincts, but the appearance of the houses seemed to deprive them of romance. Swarms of imperfectly washed children with Semitic features encumbered the pavements; and he passed in

succession a club for Swiss waiters, three manufacturing milliners, some French polishers, and a ladies' tailor called Popowsckzki. No amount of squalor, however, could entirely obscure the beauty of the substantial flat-fronted, brick houses, with their well-proportioned windows, elegant doorways, and discreetly decorated iron balconies. Adrian found himself wondering what this street must have looked like in those "better days" which almost the whole of London would seem—to the casual wanderer—to have known about a century ago.

When after turning a corner he came into Fitzroy Street, and, searching for Guy's number, found himself in the Square, Adrian's spirits revived at once, and he gave an inward shout of pleasure when he saw the massive pediments, the carved friezes, and elaborate greystone façades of the Adam houses on his left and right. One house had a charming urn about which hung a garland of stone flowers, standing over its broad doorway, and almost all the others had each their individual attractions. They must have been great days, the "better days" of Fitzroy Square, Adrian reflected. He walked slowly round the circular gardens, with their rather melancholy trees, until he found the northern end of Fitzroy Street. Guy's house turned out to be roughly midway between the Square and the Euston Road. It was a fine example of the characteristic London house, with

well-proportioned windows, broad front door, and dignified staircase. The fresh paint on doors and window-frames had given it an oddly spruce appearance in comparison with its more shabby neighbours.

Adrian found the front door open. Just inside was a board on which over a padlocked letter-box was the legend, in white paint, "First Floor, Mr. Guy Bridges."

Adrian ran up the stairs, two at a time, until he came to his friend's door, on which he knocked with his walking-stick. He was as pleased and excited as a schoolboy. After what seemed a considerable pause, he heard a sound as if some one were getting out of a deep arm-chair. Then, rather suddenly, the door opened inwards, and he found himself shaking Guy by the hand, and trying to make a hundred remarks in the same breath.

"It's simply splendid to see you again, Adrian," Guy said. "I never expected my letter would get to you so soon. Thought you might be a monk, or a missionary in Otaihiti!" The uneasiness which so often attends the meeting of school or college friends after an interval of years never had a chance to make its appearance, thanks to Guy's tact and high spirits, and they took up their intimacy exactly where they had left it off. To Adrian, after his long privation from the companionship of men with whom he was fundamentally in sympathy, it was a great delight

to be able to talk to some one who “spoke the same language” as himself. He poured into Guy’s ears the tale of his adventures, his decision to give up the idea of taking Orders, his efforts at journalism, and his determination to take up scribbling as a profession. Then, to Guy’s exquisite amusement, he related the episode of Cora Belmont.

“We English are inimitable !” was Guy’s only comment. He looked at his friend with the old affectionate raillery as he made the remark.

“Oh, shut up, Guy, or I’ll hurl something at you !” said Adrian, laughing. Then—half to change the subject and half because, owing to the conversational pressure of the first twenty minutes of their meeting, it had only just dawned on him—he said, enthusiastically, “What a splendid room !”

“I *do* feel rather self-satisfied about it,” Guy admitted. “But this is a neighbourhood for lovely rooms, though you might not think it. There’s an Angelica Kauffmann ceiling in the next street, and a marble chimney-piece like mine, in the same room with it. The room also holds a family consisting of a mother and father, two daughters, a son, and three cats. . . . A room that has had anything of a ‘past,’ though, will always look well again, if it is given a chance. No amount of squalor can injure good proportions. That’s why I’d sooner live in an old house that has once

been a good 'un than in some jimcrack modern flat with no matter how many improvements."

Guy's studio certainly justified its owner's pride of possession. Occupying all the front of the house on the first floor, with three tall windows stretching from the floor almost up to the ceiling, and flooding it with light, it had something of the dignity of an earlier age—a dignity enhanced by the plain marble chimney-piece and moulded ceiling. Guy had had the walls of the room dis-tempered a deep primrose. The floor was stained black and highly polished, and partly covered by two or three good Persian rugs. A large book-case, enamelled white, was fixed into the wall, on the side facing the windows, and two of Guy's Oxford arm-chairs of red leather were drawn up in front of the fireplace. There were only three framed pictures on the walls—a treasured painting by Augustus John, looking astonishingly like an "old master," over the chimney-piece; and two dark green Dutch landscapes of the school of Jacob van Ruisdael—but unframed canvases stood with their backs to the wall all round the room. Half the room was taken up with easels, while a low stage or dais stood in the corner opposite the fireplace, with an oak chair on it, over the arm of which lay some silk draperies.

Adrian began examining Guy's recent work when they had finished listening to one another's stories. It was extraordinarily different from

the Beardsleyesque trivialities of his Oxford days. It was bolder, harsher, more insolent, aspiring, and dissatisfied. Whilst Adrian "took in" his friend's appearance, and noted all the changes in him, it occurred to him that the change in his work was a reflection of the change in his entire personality. From one or two small observations which Guy had let fall Adrian realized that he had come to detest Oxford, to regard the place as a wretched, reactionary little preparatory school for the sons of plutocrats. Adrian got an impression that, after Paris, Guy was a little ashamed of ever having been there, and strove as far as possible to conceal it.

"You must have had a good time in Paris, Guy," he remarked casually, as he turned over his friend's charcoal drawings. One model in particular seemed to have fired Bridges' imagination. There were studies of her full face and in profile, sketches of her slim body, with its great length from hip to ankle, drawings of her dressed for the street in every kind of adorable hat. And with its face turned to the wall, Adrian found an unfinished portrait in oils of the same girl, in which she was wearing a black hat with a feather, and in which her face looked out of the canvas with wide eyes and quivering, despondent mouth. It was clear that Guy had known her, whoever she was, in many moods, and had loved her. The face haunted one with its expression

of courage, affection, and simplicity. It showed Adrian a type of woman of which his ecclesiastical training had kept him greatly in ignorance, but which, in imagination, he had for long adored.

"We used to share a little flat in Paris," Guy said, in answer to the question which lay behind Adrian's remark. "We were very happy." He sighed and turned away, leaving the story untold, but showing for an instant to Adrian an unsuspected capacity for sorrow. They went back to their arm-chairs.

"I never could get the tea habit," said Guy, "so you must let me make you a whisky-and-soda. Same old whisky, you see!" he added, pointing to the label, which bore the name of an Oxford tradesman. "Beastly stuff, really, but they give me credit. I always think Oxford whisky has a certain noxious, cooked-up, but alluring flavour of its own—like certain kinds of bad cigarettes!"

While the whisky was being poured out a knock came at the door, and a voice, the most agreeable which Corbet could remember to have heard, called out, "Are you at home, Guy?"

"Come in, Queen!" Guy shouted, putting down the syphon, and throwing open the door. A girl, with laughing blue eyes, glorious brown hair shot with gold, and a clear complexion, in which the most delightful colour came and went, entered quickly, and then stopped when she saw Adrian. She was dressed in a cream-coloured cotton frock,

and looked very fresh and charming. Guy pronounced her name audibly for once in a way, and Adrian realized that he had been introduced to a Miss Moore. He liked her name, and he liked even better her expression of subdued animation, humour, and intelligence. Even at a first glance she seemed curiously immaterial, a creature of light and fire.

“Just in time to pour your whisky away, Guy,” she said laughingly. “Mr. Corbet can have his, if he is good. But Guy is on a tea regime. He can’t make it himself, so I come in and make it for him.”

A kettle had been filled and put on a gas ring while she spoke. Adrian loved her for being so quick.

“You see the way she keeps me in order,” said Guy humorously. “She runs the Squash like that. That’s why we call her Queen Elizabeth. Regular boss, aren’t you, Queen? We all have to kowtow.”

“Do tell me what the Squash is?” Adrian asked.

“Oh,” said Guy, “the Squash has to be seen to be believed. A house like this one, only better, in Northampton Street, on the other side of the Square, is its headquarters. If you are nice to the Queen, she will ask you to visit them. Two men and two girls live there *en famille*, and Madame Mirbeau presides over them from the

basement. She is a perfect darling, with brown eyes and a black moustache . . . and her omelettes ! As she invariably sleeps all day and all night the chaperonage is not important. . . .”

“Yes, do come and see us,” the Queen broke in. “We are always on view, particularly in the evenings. You must bring him with you, Guy !”

Adrian's delight was obvious, and he bitterly regretted having to go away—he was on duty at the Boys' Club that evening—before he had time to see more of this delightful girl who had flashed like a shaft of sunlight across his path.

CHAPTER XI

THAT there are days which are unpropitious and others which are lucky, disastrous days and days when everything goes well, is a fact which the least superstitious person must recognize. On the day after Adrian's visit to Guy Bridges—a damp, bleak September day—he regretted that the custom of taking the omens had died out. If he had taken them he would have avoided the meeting of the committee of St. Monica's Guild, and if he had done that he would not have put his foot in it with Miss Harris. He and Miss Harris might be said to have had words. He pictured Miss Harris describing to all the other workers how she had “put that young man in his place.” The next untoward event, after the encounter with Miss Harris, was the receipt of a letter from Mrs. Harford, which came by the afternoon post.

DEAR MR. CORBET,

As it has come to my knowledge that you have been lending an indecent book to my daughter Rose, a story of a nature calculated to do grave injury to a young girl, I must ask you to in future discontinue your visits to my house. I consider your conduct most unworthy of a candidate for the priesthood, and have felt it my duty to inform Father Martin, in whose

hands the matter now lies. My discovery of the way you have repaid my hospitality has hurt me deeply ; but I shall remember you in my prayers, in order that you may come to see the wickedness of what you have done.

Yours sincerely,

RACHEL HARFORD.

“Well, I’m hanged !” he muttered. “And a split infinitive into the bargain !”

He was still fuming with annoyance and wondering what on earth Rose had been telling her mother when the girl herself appeared, shepherded by Mrs. Murphy. She went up to him quickly and took his hands. Her emotion was so great that she had difficulty in speaking.

“I am so sorry, Adrian,” she stammered. “What has mother said?”

Adrian handed her the letter, which she read hastily.

“I’m afraid it was all my fault for being careless. Mother found in my bedroom a copy of ‘Jude the Obscure’ that I borrowed off you some time ago. I asked you for it specially one day and helped myself to it from your bookcase. I don’t suppose you really heard the name of the book I was taking——”

“Well, at all events, it’s one of the most splendid novels in the English language,” snorted Adrian with purple face, up in arms for the cause of Art.

“Mother doesn’t think so evidently,” sobbed Rose. “She just looked at the title and then

got into a dreadful rage. We quarrelled most hopelessly."

Rose sank on her cousin's sofa and dabbed her face with a tiny handkerchief.

"I do feel so miserable about it. It will put you in such an awful position with Father Martin."

Adrian put a comforting arm round the heaving shoulders and bent his head down to the dark head near him. The distresses of women always made him feel sentimental. An embrace seemed imminent, and might have occurred if an elementary sense of prudence had not warned him that she would have read "meanings" into it that he did not intend. In his mind's eye, also, he saw the gentle, mocking smile of Queen Elizabeth, heard the silver laughter that made havoc of false emotion. He stroked Rose's hand instead of kissing her, and told her not to worry. He had quite decided to give up the idea of being ordained in any case, and this would make a convenient excuse. He didn't in the least mind Father Martin knowing, and, as it happened, he was dining with Father Martin that night, so that it would all be over quickly, and in a day or two he would have disappeared.

"Where are you going to?" she asked rudely.

"I'm going to stay with some friends in Fitzroy Street," Adrian replied. "A man I used to know at Oxford has a studio there. I shall get rooms near him, I expect, or in the same house, and try

to make a living as a journalist. I'm evidently no use as a parson."

A violent shudder ran through Rose's body as he said this. Her face twitched and the tears began to gather afresh in her eyes, though there was no real sorrow in her face. Adrian wondered if she could really be crying with rage and disappointment, and, if so, what it was that had disappointed her. He could not believe that she would really miss him as much as that, though, as she said good-bye to him, she gasped out—

"And when you are gone off to your Fitzroy Square, I shan't ever see anything of you"—as though she were broken-hearted.

Adrian reflected that if he could only be desperately in love with her matters would be so much simpler. They parted a little awkwardly. . . .

When Rose got back to her home she went straight up to her room, and after taking off her frock and changing into a wrapper, she lay on her bed and indulged in the luxury of a good cry. Life for her seemed to have become unbearable. She was twenty-four—long past the age when other girls began life, and yet life had not begun for her. She knew she was beautiful, and that if only she could escape from her environment she would be admired, she would succeed. She unlocked a drawer in her dressing-table and took out a book—one of the volumes in her secret library the know-

ledge of whose existence would have shocked Mrs. Harford still more than "Jude the Obscure"—and read over again the "Story of Jane Maltravers." Jane Maltravers was a clergyman's daughter, who ran away from home to London and became a waitress in a tea-shop, where she attracted the attention of a Russian prince. This gentleman asked her out to dine, and gave her "doctored champagne." When she woke up in the morning she was in a sumptuous bed-chamber with purple satin curtains, and had a maid to escort her to her scented bath. It was all very nice indeed. The Russian prince would have married her if he could, but there were Court intrigues which made it impossible. Rose reflected ruefully that there were no Russian princes on Haverstock Hill. She longed to become the mistress of any one who would take her away, show her the world, the parts of London where people were gay and never went to church. She felt wasted, desperate. In six years she would be thirty: a middle-aged woman, unloved, her youth and beauty thrown away on an odious suburb! The thought was unbearable. She realized now how much she had been counting on Adrian, and his imminent departure filled her with consternation. When her weeping fit had exhausted itself, she got up hastily and strove to repair the effects of it by washing her eyes with warm water and carefully powdering her face and neck.

As she looked long and mournfully into the glass she was not really displeased with her appearance, though her hazel eyes were still rather red round the rims. Her dark hair waved beautifully over the white forehead ; her ears were very small and pretty ; curling wisps of hair grew round them. On the whiteness of her skin the narrow and beautifully shaped black eyebrows looked almost as if they had been drawn by an artist. Her nose, though straight, was perhaps a little insignificant. She would have liked finer nostrils, and her lips, though an alluring red, were a trifle bunchy. Her teeth were big, dazzling white, and quite even. She wished she smiled naturally more often.

The first dinner gong sounded, and as she began slowly to get into the frock she proposed to wear during the evening, she thought of the acid remarks her mother would be sure to make in the drawing-room as she bent over her work-basket. Those terrible after-dinner hours in the drawing-room ! Would she never escape from them ? Even James had his club to go to. It was in Albemarle Street, and a relief from home, in spite of the fact that its *raison d'être* was "organized social service." How bored she was with "the graceless poor," as Father Martin had once described them, in her presence.

The second gong resounded, with its subdued suggestion of domestic holiness and grace before nourishing food. Rose put a little more powder

on her face than usual in the hope that her mother would notice, gave her nails a final polish, and went downstairs in a mood of silent revolt. Her mother looked more dour than usual. Evidently they were going to fight about "Jude" after dinner, when that work-basket was produced.

"We won't wait for James," remarked Mrs. Harford, in a way which maddened Rose.

She hated James, but why on earth couldn't they give him two minutes in which to tie his tie? As though the miserable boiled mutton would hurt in the least by waiting! James's prompt appearance as they were going into the dining-room was a momentary relief to her annoyance, but it broke out again in the course of the meal. The familiar white china soup-tureen, and the picture of her mother ladling out watery soup from it drove her to desperation.

Mrs. Harford's thin voice made highly technical inquiries about the organized social service.

James answered her monosyllabically, between gulps of soup—

"Forty-eight cases on my list to-day . . . some very interesting . . . we relieved fifteen. . . . Put the rest in the card index and made further inquiries." . . .

"Any undeserving applications?" inquired Mrs. Harford.

"Oh yes, several," James replied. "We found

one woman who had—er—never been married. It was a gross imposition.” James’s colour heightened slightly as he added that she had purchased a wedding-ring at a pawnbroker’s at the corner of the street, in order to deceive them.

“ So I suppose you let the woman starve? ” Rose broke in, with concentrated bitterness.

“ Really, Rose ! ” James remarked with raised eyebrows. “ Did you hear this morning from Mrs. Simkinson, Mother? ” he went on, changing the subject as offensively as if he were banging a door. Rose looked at her plate with a glance of such fire that she might easily have cracked it.

After dinner, when James had departed to his club and Rose sat facing her mother under the hard glare of the electric candelabra, the long-awaited storm broke.

“ I may as well tell you, Rose,” Mrs. Harford remarked, with a faint twitching of her thin lips, “ that I have had to write to Adrian Corbet and ask him to discontinue his visits here. . . . I have been greatly mistaken in him. . . . I can see the harm he has done you in your very expression. . . . In every line of your face. You have greatly changed.”

“ I see,” said Rose very quietly. “ And you’ve done all this just because I borrowed ‘ Jude the Obscure ’ from him ! Don’t you think you are making rather a fool of yourself, Mother, if you’ll forgive me for saying so.”

"I will not forgive it, Rose! I forbid you to speak to me like this. You have no natural respect at all, no right feeling." . . .

"Why should I have any right feeling, when you go out of your way to insult my friends?"

"Every word you say shows me the harm he has done you. I shall write to Aunt Louisa; he ought to be sent out of the country. He ought not to stay here another day. . . ." Mrs. Harford's thin face flushed. As her anger rose she began to lose her self-control, and the bitter natural hatred of her type of person for Adrian's type found at last its full expression.

Rose's anger had made her pale. She listened with scornful coolness to her mother's outburst of feeling, which, if misguided, was at least genuine.

"Oh, he's going right enough," she sneered. "The atmosphere of this house would put any one off religion. Nothing but suspicion and uncharitableness and thinking evil of one's neighbour! He's going all right. You'd better give me his copy of 'Jude the Obscure' so that I can send it back. . . . By the way, have you ever read the book?" Rose asked.

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Harford. "I have heard quite enough about its indelicacy. . . . I don't read books of that kind, and while you stay under my roof you shall not either." . . .

"Moral, don't stay under your roof," said Rose, as though addressing herself.

Mrs. Harford seemed suddenly to shrivel up. The rare and painful tears began to pour down her cheeks on to her sewing. Her face looked grey and drawn ; her shoulders became drooped and rounded ; and the spectacle of such heart-broken sorrow filled Rose with uneasiness and irritation. She felt her mother had no right to exhibit this blackmailing distress. It was monstrous ; it put her in a ridiculous and impossible position. And yet the grief was real enough. Rose perceived that underneath her harshness and unreasonableness her mother loved her, and wanted her most earnestly to be "good" after her own design.

"If only she would realize I'm twenty-four," Rose thought, "and let me grow up in my own way. How well we should get on !" Then instinct tardily asserted itself. She put her arms round her mother's sunken and heaving shoulders, and her cheek against her mother's damp cheek. "There, darling, don't cry about it," she said. "I'm sorry I hurt you. I didn't mean it, but you don't understand ; you don't, really." . . .

The argument was on the point of beginning again, but Rose, feeling that her mother's tears would handicap her, hastily suppressed it. They sat in silence for a while, a silence punctuated by Mrs. Harford's sniffs, but though Rose said nothing her brain was working at high pressure. She saw at once that the reconciliation was only

momentary. She could not give in to her mother's point of view. Matters had come to a head at last. Things could never be the same again. She, like Adrian, would show that she had the pluck to break free. She wouldn't be left to wither in the odour of sanctity in this dreadful suburb. She took deep breaths into her lungs as though she were inhaling the fresh air of freedom, and as soon as she could do so she pleaded a headache, kissed her mother with a sudden access of affection for which she could not readily account, and went upstairs to her room with a light step and beating heart.

CHAPTER XII

FATHER MARTIN lived in a shabby house, one of an undistinguished terrace opposite St. Philemon's which had obviously seen better days. His poverty, however, was not paraded, nor had he seen any necessity for encasing himself in a setting that was either ugly or professional. His dining-room was not furnished with rush-seated chairs, nor was his sideboard loaded with dog's-eared copies of special hymn-books. The room was not used for meetings on "Tuesdays and Fridays." Forbidding as the house was in its outward appearance, there was none of the parish grime within doors. Some good engravings hung against the cream-coloured distemper in the hall ; the dining-room was furnished with a few genuine pieces from the home of Father Martin's boyhood, and on the walls hung mellow Italian pictures—two highly varnished Canalettos and a Madonna, with eyes upturned and a bright blue wimple over her red dress, in the style of Guido Reni. Upstairs, in his long study—the drawing-room of the house—an immense writing-table stood on the thick green carpet, and two capacious arm-chairs were drawn up conversa-

tionally before a carved chimney-piece. The walls of the room were lined with books, and a visitor of a literary turn of mind might have wondered how Claudel's "L'Annonce faite à Marie" and Francis Jammes's "De l'Angélus de l'Aube à l'Angélus du Soir" came to jostle Newman and Pusey, or how it was that on a shelf with a collection of the Fathers was a rare edition of the "Summa Benedicti." Father Martin's books, indeed, reflected the personality of their owner, which had a quality of almost perverse humanity and humour, as attractive as it was rare.

When Adrian arrived a few minutes before eight, the old man was standing against the chimney-piece in his study, smoking a Russian cigarette. In his black velvet smoking coat, broad black tie, and expanse of shirt-front he looked rather like a cardinal in mufti, or a Jesuit diplomatist. The face was curiously Italian, with its Roman nose, piercing eyes, full of humour and wisdom, and the fine white hair.

"Glad to see you, Corbet," he remarked, as Adrian was announced by his servant. "Have a Dubonnet? I've just bought a dozen bottles. You won't believe me, but until a few months ago I thought it was the name of a suburb near Passy. I couldn't think why all the *mouches* on the Seine went there." He poured out Adrian's *apéritif* as he spoke, and handed him a cigarette. "It's a bad plan to smoke before dinner," he

remarked, "but I always do it, from sheer delight in sin!"

While he finished his Dubonnet, and afterwards, during the excellent dinner which Father Martin's cook had provided, Adrian felt a painful tugging at the heart to think of what he would soon have to divulge. To turn his back on all that Father Martin represented would mean so much. He understood so well the points of view, the habits of life of his friend. Oxford had given him an intense feeling for the romance and charm of scholarship, for the importance of the purely useless. He had never in the whole course of his existence come in contact with commerce, had never even met people who made money. In his experience money—and not too much of it, certainly—was just *there*. From the vantage-point of Father Martin's dinner-table he looked out with apprehension over the struggling throng called "the world" into which he was proposing to plunge. If only he had Father Martin's holiness and faith, how much more suited to him—he reflected—would a priest's life have been, than any other! It was only on the rare occasions when he seemed to detect, even in this liberal priest, a small professional bias and restriction of thought that it occurred to him that scholarship and the worship of the Pure Idea and tranquillity of mind could possibly exist without Christianity.

They had reached the stage of port and

cigarettes and the servant had left them alone before the subject uppermost in both their minds was touched on.

“Well, you vile seducer,” remarked the old man, when there came a pause in the conversation, “so I hear you have been playing the Don Juan up at ‘St. Chad’s.’ I shall have to consult the Bishop about you, I can see.”

He laughed with a rich inner chuckle, as though the joke were too good for anything, but there came a flash of seriousness when he added—

“You were a silly boy, though, to recommend the girl disturbing books, and if the mother were not such a crass fool, she would have been in the right. If Rose wants to read about sexual matters, let her read ‘Tom Jones,’ and get a reasonable view of life, not this modern stuff. After her skirmish with her mother, though, Rose will go reading all the garbage she can get hold of—a martyr to the cause of Liberty! Why are religious women such fools?”

“It was stupid of me to lend her the book,” Corbet admitted. “But she took it off my shelf one day, and it never occurred to me to stop her. I’d forgotten all about it till she told me about the row. I had a letter from Mrs. Harford to-night,” he added, “forbidding me the house. I thought it rather unnecessary of her.”

“Women, my boy,” said Father Martin, lighting Adrian’s cigarette and his own, “are completely

cracked. A woman's religion and a man's are two different things. With a woman her religion is always a personal one—damnably personal, as many a poor devil of a curate has discovered. St. Paul knew a thing or two : that's why the Suffragettes hate him so. If you had run a poor parish as many years as I have you would learn to disregard hysterical outbursts and to walk warily. You cannot do without women, unfortunately. They have a boundless enthusiasm (often misdirected) for parish work, and plenty of spare time. Their energy in decorating the church for festivals is simply paralysing. The poor priest is nearly asphyxiated at the Easter Mass by the smell of the lilies with which they love to surround him." He threw his cigarette away, took a large pinch of snuff from a tortoiseshell-case which he carried in his waistcoat pocket, and blew his nose.

"Their thoughts, too," he went on, "are not a man's thoughts. They 'get there' by an entirely different road, one with which reason—to their credit be it said—has nothing whatever to do. When they don't 'get there,' which is often, they are apt to make one peevish. And preserve me from a female pharisee : she is more heartless than a nest of boa-constrictors ! Our friend Mrs. Harford makes even me, tough and seasoned as I am, writhe sometimes. She talks about the Almighty as if she kept Him in a cupboard !"

Father Martin threw back his great leonine head

and laughed heartily at his thoughts, while his guest lit a fresh cigarette and puffed it vigorously, as if seeking encouragement and support for what he was about to say.

At last Adrian remarked rather jerkily, "Do you know, sir, I don't believe I've got a real vocation for the priesthood."

"No decent fellow ever does," said Father Martin, cocking a wise eye in the young man's direction, and pretending not to look. "Just wish you had one for all you are worth, and do your best with yourself as you are. It is priggish to feel cocksure that you have a special, properly endorsed commission from Headquarters. Nobody is worth that. You don't serve Christ as a priest because He has taken the trouble to appoint you specially to do so, but because from your devotion to Him you wish to be allowed to do it."

"Yes, but one must believe," said Adrian.

"Yes, my son, you must believe. But it was once said, you remember, 'Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.' There is a lot in that, and in the Bible generally, in spite of the way some of the Nonconformists vulgarize it. If you, in your heart, want to believe, want to be worthy of the priesthood (which nobody is), well, there's hope, and you are healthy. You must be sure, though, to want those two things with all your heart."

"That is just the point," said Corbet gloomily.

"Lately I've felt I didn't want them at all, and as though the finest thing in the world would be to be a successful writer. I thought I had better own up about it."

Father Martin looked at his young assistant shrewdly and sadly.

"My boy, you should never talk about such things as doubts until you *must*. Doubts have a way of disappearing by daylight, and Faith has a way of turning up when you least expect her. I remember crossing one day from Dover to Calais with a friend of mine—a cheerful, pagan fellow, who had been a good Catholic in his youth. It was a rough crossing, and he was horribly ill. After his third or fourth donation to the fishes, he fell on his knees in the smoking-room on deck and said more fervent *Aves* than he had uttered in his life before. If you leave me to-morrow, my boy, and become a writer or a journalist (which Heaven forbid!) don't you be too certain that you have dodged your faith."

They were silent for a moment, and Adrian rose to go, his mind torn with doubt and confusion and unhappiness. The wise old priest did not seek to detain him, for he well knew the fight which was in store for Corbet: the fight which must be fought alone and without help, in which none can say who has won until Death makes all dark things clear. As he showed the boy out into the street, however, he remarked with an earnestness

which sat strangely on a face which seemed framed only for Falstaffian laughter :

“When you are faced with a crisis, your heart will tell you strange things, Adrian. The Catholic faith is wonderfully tenacious. Drink and dirty living may kill it in a man for a time, but with disasters and the approach of Death it comes to life again, and he reaches out for it instinctively. Then a man finds that even a narrow road with lots of broken glass and mantraps—and no mirage—is better than losing your way hopelessly in a desert !” . . . They shook hands affectionately.

“By the way,” Father Martin remarked just before he closed his front door, “it has just occurred to me that if you do decide to go in for journalism, I might be able to give you a useful introduction. Lord Bridley, who owns *The Hour* and the *Saturday Messenger* and one or two other papers, used to be on my staircase at Oriel. I’ll give you a letter to take to him if you like. . . . Good-night.”

CHAPTER XIII

IN answer to a short and imperious note which reached him on the morning after his visit to Father Martin, Adrian hastened to present himself at Old Compton Hall. He was glad of this excuse for saying farewell to his Hampstead acquaintances by letter instead of in person, and before he drove away to the station he sent notes to Rose and Father Martin and to one or two other friends he had made in the parish. When these had been dispatched and his luggage put into the cab he heaved a sigh of relief. The world was all before him.

In the train, on the way to the small Essex station where John would meet him with the wagonette, his thoughts dwelt on the old woman who had tyrannized over him all his life, and for whom he had an affection almost amounting to adoration. Even as a boy he had always admired the long, delicate hands which boxed his ears. He remembered watching with delight the thin white wrist emerging from the old-fashioned ruffled sleeve of the arm uplifted to strike him. He loved her fearless, vehement black eyes, her

unfettered spirit. She had always been severe with him, but she had never let him be ill-used by strangers, had always fought his battles. The privilege of reviling him in excellent, old-fashioned phrases she reserved to herself. If others attempted anything of the kind in her presence they fared badly. Now that he was grown up she was still inclined to speak her mind, but she treated him for the rest with a distinguished courtesy, as a man capable of looking after his own affairs. She never asked him a question or sought in any way to influence him. As a result of this he made a point of telling her everything, rejoicing in her directness of speech, her hatred of humbug, and her sagacity. One of the things which confirmed him in his decision to give up his work at St. Philemon's—though he would not have admitted it himself—lay in the fact that he knew she did not approve of his choice of career.

The friendly smile of old John Twelvetrees, his aunt's coachman, who was waiting for him outside the little station of Long Orchard, the town nearest Old Compton Hall, sent a thrill of pleasure through Corbet. The delight of coming home, of hearing all the village gossip and the simple chronicles of the people among whom he had spent his happy childhood ! Suddenly all these things seemed to have acquired a new value for him. With a cleared vision he perceived the charm and goodness of all the familiar scenes on which

he had turned his back. The only thing he hoped and prayed for was that Aunt Louisa would not have "got in" any of the really nice girls from the neighbouring houses. That was the only point on which he considered his aunt absurd. She did not seem to realize the paralysing tediousness of the young girls of her own class. The fact that the parents who begot them were "all right" was enough for Aunt Louisa. Adrian and she used frequently to argue this point. Aunt Louisa's contention was that all a man wanted, anyway, was a healthy girl, of decent breeding, who wasn't a pauper; that girls were all the same *au fond*—"county" and "chorus." They both had to be married before you could do anything with them, and the former were easier to mould because they had, as a rule, fewer bad habits. Adrian yearned obstinately for temperament, and his aunt deplored the fact that clever men were always such fools. "When they give up dogs and horses, our men lose all knowledge of life, Adrian," she once remarked. "And, believe me, *savoir vivre* is all that matters here below. But there, my dear boy, I forgot for a moment that you were more interested in the hereafter!"

The wagonette swung between the stone pillars which upheld the arms of the Corbets, slowed up, then gathered motion again in the familiar way, and swayed down the long drive till the square, red-brick Georgian house came in view,

with its line of white-framed windows and its handsome stone portico. In a few moments the butler and parlourmaid had divested Adrian of his outer clothes and removed his luggage, and he was walking over the slippery floor of the saloon to where his aunt was sitting in her familiar chair. Her ebony walking-stick lay ready to hand against the chair's arm, a tiny fire burned brightly in the midst of the huge fireplace, and through the windows on her left could be seen the long terrace at the back of the house and a few late roses in the gardens beyond it.

Aunt Louisa put down her book and her *face-à-main* when her nephew entered, and smiled at him quizzically. "How do you do, Adrian," she remarked. "It seems you have been making rather a fool of yourself with all this curate business!" She looked rather pleased about it than otherwise, though her tone was acid. "I hope you won't find," she went on, "that you cannot undo your mistakes simply by ordering new clothes and coming to stay with me. It sticks, a blunder like that, it sticks! However, I'd sooner have a fool for a nephew than a humbug, I admit. I hope you haven't been contaminated by the atmosphere of Rachel Harford's household. . . . And what has that dangerously good-looking girl grown into?"

"Oh, Rose!" said Adrian, without embarrassment. "She's rather a good sort; but not specially exciting."

“Not intellectually exciting, I suppose you mean,” said Aunt Louisa shrewdly. She had her own views about Rose, but did not trouble to elaborate them to her nephew. They talked on trivial matters till teatime, when some neighbours called—old Colonel Grenville and his wife—who had known Adrian since he was a baby, and indulged in homely reminiscences of his youthful escapades. Afterwards, Aunt Louisa went off on the arm of her companion to rest for an hour before dinner, and Adrian, like a schoolboy just back from the holidays, went to look round the house and to gossip with the servants and be made a fuss of.

He could not understand why he was so happy. He felt like an undergraduate again as he tied his tie and looked in the glass, and out of sheer high spirits he told the butler to get up a bottle of champagne.

At dinner he found Aunt Louisa in a most unwonted mood of cheerfulness. She actually hinted that she would not mind very much if he stayed on at Old Compton Hall for a while, before beginning his new life in Fitzroy Square. This was, for her, an unheard-of concession to sentiment. Usually she was at infinite pains to explain that Adrian was not to stay an instant longer than he desired, and that she herself was entirely indifferent as to his coming and going. She did not have very high hopes for his success as a writer, but to her a

writer—even a journalist—was infinitely preferable to a clergyman. For the clergy she entertained an exaggerated loathing, and her battles with the successive rectors of Old Compton had become historic. She therefore said nothing to discourage Adrian. Her only stipulation was that if he went to live in an unsavoury part of London, “near the Euston Road,” he wasn’t to turn his back on civilization altogether. The Grenvilles, for instance, would be at their house in Eaton Place all the winter. He ought to dine with them once a fortnight at least, just to keep in touch with people who knew him. The prospect didn’t seem exciting, but Adrian promised he would do so.

He would probably have stayed on longer at Old Compton if he had not received—forwarded on from his rooms in Mornington Crescent—the proofs of a long article on certain phases of modern art which he had sent to Lord Bridley’s weekly review, the *Saturday Messenger*, and a notification of the acceptance of some verses by him in another weekly paper. These early successes were almost overpowering. They seemed much too good to be true. Even Aunt Louisa respected the two papers in which his work was to appear. The ball seemed to be at his feet. At last he had found his true career. In his delight at his success, all feelings of disappointment with himself or sorrow for his withered aspirations were completely smothered. He thought no more

of the past, but looked confidently towards a future that should contain love, happiness, and glory. He wrote a line to Guy Bridges to say that he was coming up to London on Tuesday morning and that he would go straight to Fitzroy Street.

It was curious how in his thoughts of the future the bright eyes of Elizabeth Moore seemed always to find a place, to be beckoning him on to fantastic adventures to the sound of silver laughter. As for Rose, it was inevitable that he should be unable to disentangle her from the morbidness, turgidity, and disappointments which his life at Hampstead had meant for him. A feeling of uneasiness came over him whenever he thought of her.

CHAPTER XIV

ON his arrival at Liverpool Street Adrian got into a cab and drove at once to his friend's rooms. It was a typical October day—grey, damp, and gentle. The yellow leaves in the Bloomsbury Squares, through which the cabby took him in order to increase the fare, fell on the roadway and softened the noise of traffic. Blue trails of smoke curled up from a hundred boarding-house chimneys. It was the kind of day when London wears its most romantic, most characteristic, and most alluring garb. Adrian sat back in the cab with the window open, and drew the rich, damp air through his nostrils. He hadn't felt so happy and excited for years.

The taxi drew up almost too soon at Guy's door in Fitzroy Street—cutting short for Adrian the intense pleasure of anticipation.

When he had got his baggage stacked in the hall and had paid off the cabman, he ran up and knocked at Guy's door.

"Here you are at last!" was his friend's laconic exclamation. "You look as if you were off to Paris with a chorus-girl. What has come

over you, Adrian? Why this air of festive naughtiness ! ”

Guy was standing up in a large bath placed in front of the studio fire, with a cigarette in his mouth and a towel round his waist. He was a finely built man of about twenty-seven, and held himself like one who knew the value of his own lines. As he spoke, some drops of water from his hair fell on to his cigarette, reducing it to a sodden mass, which he threw affectionately at Corbet.

“ Have a cigarette,” he suggested, “ while I get some clothes on.”

While Guy was vigorously drying himself and pulling on his shirt and trousers, Adrian related in detail the story of his departure from Hampstead and his success with the *Saturday Messenger*.

“ Well, I’m glad you’ve come to live with me,” said Guy ; “ you know it. But I must say it is just as well Aunt Louisa continues to smile on you if you want to make a career of journalism.”

“ Who said I was going to live with you ? ” said Adrian, ignoring the latter part of the sentence.

“ Why, of course you are ! ” Guy looked up with large eyes, pretending to be mystified. “ Naturally. There’s a spare room upstairs, and heaps of room for two of us in the studio. I have always hated eating alone. The arrangement will be splendid. Besides, I’ve fixed it all up with my landlady.”

Adrian was very grateful to Guy for his friendly welcome. It all seemed too good to be true. Evidently life was beginning over again beautifully : he felt an extraordinary zest for it.

"When am I to be allowed to see the Squash," he asked, naïvely indicating that he had not forgotten his meeting with Queen Elizabeth.

"We'll go over there in a little while," said Guy. "But we must lunch first."

Guy busied himself in cupboards, and in a surprisingly short time had a meal prepared of cold tongue with plenty of French bread, butter, and cheese, and a bottle of Chablis. When they had digested this and smoked a couple of cigarettes, they went out and walked across the square to Northampton Street. The house in which the Squash had taken up its quarters was on the right-hand side of this street, about twenty yards from the south-western end of Fitzroy Square. Although resembling, in its general plan, the majority of the bigger houses in the neighbourhood, it had certain charming characteristics of its own. The three elegant wrought-iron balconies which clung round the lower parts of the tall first-floor windows were unexpectedly ornamental in design. The roof, of weather-beaten brown tiles, which could be seen from the opposite side of the road, rising about its flat façade of dark brick, and its broad stone pediment suggested that the house was perhaps older than its neighbours, or had been less altered. The

smaller details of ironwork and stonework both inside and out had a special elegance. The points of difference about No. 7 which marked it out to the discerning culminated in a curious carved face—half-sinister, half-mocking—which was set in the stone arch just above its front door, and from which it derived its nickname of “the Devil’s House.” It was the face of a man with pointed beard and rather Mephistophelian moustaches. His mouth was set half-open in an evil grin; the eyeballs were turned upwards in the sockets; the ears were pointed, like a faun’s. How the face had come there no one could say. Perhaps it had been brought from France by some former owner, who had thus left behind him the record of his impassioned cynicism. Certainly it was older than the great urn and the friezes of the Adam houses in the Square, which Adrian had so much admired on his first visit, and it gave No. 7 a distinct personality for any one sensitive to a building’s “soul.”

“Do you see how that devil imitates a Nonconformist snuffle with one part of its face and grins superciliously with the rest?” Guy remarked, as they stood waiting for the door to be opened. “It sneers at the most sacred emotions! No one could indulge in false sentiment or become ‘dewy’ who had to encounter that grimace every morning.”

The door was “answered” by an elderly and smiling Frenchwoman, whom Adrian discovered

subsequently was Madame Mirbeau herself. She greeted Guy with a smile of friendship and left them to find their own way up to the studio. The spacious stone-paved hall and the stone staircase with its wrought-iron balusters filled Adrian with joy as he hurried after Guy to the door of what had once been an elegant drawing-room, and from behind which came the sound of laughter and the buzz of conversation. Guy tapped and went in, and in a moment Adrian found himself in a beautifully proportioned room, larger and loftier than Guy's, in which a group of people were sitting and talking. The walls of the room, like Guy's, were distempered, but in a curious "oyster" colour; the paint was white, and there was an austere ornamented marble chimney-piece. It was the kind of room in which one could imagine ladies of an earlier generation being "vastly witty" in Empire gowns, preparatory to having the "vapours" in one of the bedrooms above it. An aroma of vanished elegance still clung to it in spite of the disorder attendant on its present uses. Piles of canvases were propped with their faces against the walls, there were several large easels wheeled into a corner one against the other, and the scanty furniture consisted of a divan, several arm-chairs, a piano, and two tables. A rather daring post-impressionist work displayed its crude but attractive colouring above the chimney-piece, and at the opposite end of the room was an old

bookcase, evidently a fixture, which appeared to contain an heterogeneous collection of volumes, mostly in paper covers. The room contained two men and two girls, and as Adrian entered it, he noticed the men first. One of them, a tremendously fat youth, was sitting at a table by the window, apparently engaged in making caricatures of his friends. The other was sitting near the fireplace with a whisky-bottle and soda-syphon by his side, and a half-filled glass in his hand. He was very handsome, Adrian noticed, and dressed rather like the most tiresome type of undergraduate, in a threadbare Norfolk jacket and grey flannel trousers, and with a flowing black silk neck-tie, tied *à la* Byron. He had long black hair, which waved with studious abandon over his forehead, and was evidently a poet. Adrian had been oddly excited at the thought of meeting his enchanting Queen Elizabeth again. She saw him first when he came into the room in Guy's wake, and came forward quickly and greeted him, much to his delight. He had been quite prepared to find that she had forgotten him. She made him feel immediately at ease, while she did the honours of the Squash with a charming "queenliness." He found himself shaking hands first with Hilda Carter, a tall, red-haired girl, dressed in flowing green "Liberty" garments, and known as Dilly; then with Hugh Winterton, the fat caricaturist, who had light hair, blue eyes, and a rather absurd

expression of wistfulness. Finally, Elizabeth introduced the remaining member of the party. "This," she said, indicating the table with the bottles and its proprietor, "is Maurice Greene. He is a poet and is drinking himself to death."

Maurice tried to look very like a "foot-in-the-grave young man," as he shook hands with Corbet, and poured himself out an exceedingly stiff whisky, while the Squash looked on with rapture.

"They are all awfully wicked," explained Guy, as he sat down by Queen Elizabeth and put his arm round her waist. "A fearful lot, really. Perfect devils. Hugh over there can paint a bit, and as for Maurice, he's a genius when he's drunk, aren't you, Maurice?"

"When I'm dead I shall be appreciated," said the poet, emptying his glass. "Meanwhile, one of you give me a cigarette."

Adrian found himself once more, as though after a sojourn in the wilderness, in a congenial atmosphere. Of all this his late training told him to disapprove, but he could see his father's laughing eyes and careless outlook reflected in the faces of the boys and girls around him.

"We aren't really all each others' masters and mistresses," explained Queen Elizabeth, with cheerful impudence, as she noticed his mildly reserved air. "We only look wicked and know all about it."

"Yes, you mustn't be frightened at them,

Adrian. They work awfully hard for pence all the morning. They only relax occasionally to keep their spirits up," explained Guy.

"What a lovely house this is!" Adrian ventured. "It is even better than Guy's. I hadn't any idea Fitzroy Square was as attractive as this."

"It would be perfect if it weren't so horribly near the Slade!" said Elizabeth.

"Rot!" broke in Guy and Hugh simultaneously. "She only says that for swank, just to show she's emancipated!"

"Mr. Corbet must see Hugh's caricatures," said Queen Elizabeth with decision. "They're rather disgracefully good."

She darted up and brought a pile of canvases together with a large portfolio from a corner of the room. The pictures were not all caricatures, and, indeed, consisted mostly of sketches of the insides of theatres by Guy, and included a number of his figure studies.

Hugh's work was extraordinarily clever, filled with an intense natural vigour and not merely inflated with the beery *fauvism* of Munich.

To cover his embarrassment while his drawings were being admired (for though fat he was very shy), the caricaturist had started playing a waltz on the tin-kettle piano which stood in one corner of the room.

"Let's dance," suggested Guy. "The exercise will clear Maurice's brain and enable him to put

away an extra half-bottle. He'll be middle-aged before he pegs out if he goes on like this, and he ought to fade at twenty-four or five to get the proper effect."

"I'm going to waltz with Mr. Corbet, Guy, if he asks me," announced Queen Elizabeth. "I think he's probably very nice."

Guy joined Dilly, and the two couples danced to the strains of the Baracarolle from "Contes d'Hoffmann" until Hugh's hands became so tired that the tune was unintelligible owing to the number of his wrong notes. When they stopped, Adrian found himself near a broad sofa, on which he and Queen Elizabeth deposited themselves, panting.

"Have you come to Fitzroy Square for good?" Elizabeth asked with a smile. Adrian admitted that he had given up the idea of being ordained and was going to be a writer instead.

"It must be nice to be a parson," she said, rather unhappily, "as long as one believes it all. I don't know much about Church now. I haven't been in one since I had my hair up and left school, but it used to seem as if you had to give up more than you could possibly gain. And Church-people—I was brought up with them, you know, as my father is a clergyman—always seemed to me a little cruel. You don't mind my saying that, do you?" She looked up at him and smiled.

"Oh no, certainly not," he said. "I could stand

everything but the good people, the shining lights of the congregation. *They* upset me completely."

"I always think it must be awfully nice to *believe* in anything," said Queen Elizabeth pensively. "It doesn't seem to matter what you believe in, so long as you *do* believe. It's that, I'm sure, which makes people act in one way rather than another—to be what they consider good rather than what they consider bad."

"What *they* consider," echoed Adrian, but without comment. That seemed suggestive of much of which he had hardly yet dared to think, but Queen Elizabeth would not let him escape for a moment.

"Right and wrong always seem to me so relative," she went on. "Dilly's wrong, for instance, wouldn't be mine at all. She objects to all sorts of things that I think good and harmless. Dilly simply hates getting caught on the landing in her dressing-gown, don't you, Dilly?" Queen Elizabeth cried, getting up and putting an affectionate arm round the red-haired girl's shoulders. "And as for mixed bathing, she'd sooner die than mixed bathe!"

"Well, we see quite enough of men on land," said Dilly. "We don't need to herd with them in the sea as well, do we?"

Adrian sat on talking and smoking, and feeling younger than he had felt for years, until Guy got up to go, and they went back to Fitzroy Street.

"You will have to accept the hospitality of

the Squash unless you are strong-minded," Guy remarked. "They've got a spare bedroom there which they are afraid Madame Mirbeau will let to a stranger."

That evening Adrian made his first acquaintance with a Bohemian restaurant. Like all of its kind, it was "positively the only one left in London." Certainly, at the little Café de l'Orient, in a small street off Golden Square, no other English people except Guy and the Squash seemed to penetrate. The proprietor and his wife were an elderly couple from Brussels, and had only taken to restaurant-keeping late in life, after a *faillite* brought about by the perfidy of M. Rousseau's best friend, a German purveyor of sausages and *delicatessen*. To this regrettable occurrence M. Rousseau would occasionally refer, always winding up his reminiscences with the philosophical exclamation, "Ah ! c'est la vie, c'est la vie !" Madame Rousseau was more animated on the subject and less resigned. She had tweaked the German's nose, and taxed him with his perfidy and called him *lâche* many times ; and how, if she had been carrying a *rigolo*, she would have riddled him ! The *crime passionel* not being so well sympathized with in Soho as it is in Paris and in Brussels, it is perhaps just as well that her *rigolo* was mislaid.

The café was divided into two parts. In the inner room, which was always dark, an unvarying *clientèle* of French waiters and cuisiniers, in or

out of work, came at unvarying hours to play dominoes, and drink black coffee, and *japonais* out of tall glasses. In the outer room, the walls of which were boarded up to the ceiling on each side, and painted a bright green, now grown rather faded and discoloured, four or five small tables were set out. This was the restaurant proper, and it was here that Guy and Adrian had their dinner. There was a little round table in the room, with a marble top, on which Guy and the other members of the Squash sometimes amused themselves by making improper sketches, while M. and Madame Rousseau looked on admiringly. To-night, however, there was no sketching, and the more elaborate ceremonies of introduction were gone through. When dark-eyed Madame Rousseau, with her round, smiling face, like a red-cheeked apple, her dark hair and red blouse, came in for her dinner with M. Rousseau, grey-haired and distinguished-looking with his grey moustache, long nose, and delicately shaped nostrils, the two vacant chairs at their table were pressed upon "Monsieur Guy" and his friend, who was introduced as "Monsieur Adrian." Thus it was that Corbet became "free" of the café, one of the inner circle of the intimates! This was indeed the very antithesis of the atmosphere of St. Chad's—perhaps, also, of Old Compton—and when he finally went to sleep in his new bedroom over Guy's studio, he slept like a child on the night before a birthday.

CHAPTER XV.

ROSE'S surmise that her reconciliation with her mother was only temporary was the fruit of experience, and turned out to be correct. Mrs. Harford was at pains to follow up her supposed advantage. She felt that her tears had—at last—touched Rose's stubborn heart; that now was the time to be firm and decisive, whilst maintaining a "loving" attitude. Rose saw through all this without difficulty. She was equally firm, and with all the vigour of her youth was determined to fight for her freedom. The cloak of affection was gradually dropped on both sides. Adrian wrote to Rose to tell her about Fitzroy Square, and to ask her to come to tea with him. Mrs. Harford saw the letter, and would have opened it and read it if she could have reached it first. She had the honesty to admit her intention. She asked Rose if Adrian had invited her to meet him, and, receiving no reply, let it be understood that if Rose saw any more of her cousin she would be sent away to stay with a distant and odious relative (on the mother's side) who lived in a suburb of Glasgow. This threat made even the courageous

Rose pause. That Glasgow cousin by marriage, whose husband was a "wee free meenister"—she was indeed an efficient bugaboo. Rose thanked her lifelong training in hypocrisy for her way out. After envisaging the situation in all its bearings, she wore an expression of pained humility and "goodness." She went to church more frequently than Mrs. Harford—being more active and free from rheumatism—and remained on her knees after services longer than any one else in the parish. Persistent rumours of her daughter's holiness reached Mrs. Harford's ears, and non-plussed her. Rose redoubled her efforts. She became the centre of the (female) religious life of St. Philemon's. She talked of becoming a postulant in an Anglican sisterhood, and spent hours with the "dear Sisters" at the mission-house—dreaming day-dreams about a week-end in Paris with 'a wealthy lover. Mrs. Harford began to feel herself outmanœuvred; she no longer inquired too closely where Rose had been, as the reply, "With the dear Sisters at the mission-house," came so disconcertingly often.

With feminine quickness of intelligence Rose perceived her mother's dilemma, and chuckled to herself. She was quite without compassion, and watched her mother's human weaknesses becoming more and more apparent, with a cold delight. Having once begun to criticize her mother and find her wanting, she completed the demolition of

her opinion of Mrs. Harford with the intemperate fury of youth. She found her mother everything that was odious : a humbug, uncharitable, coarse-minded, mean. She left her nothing; and as Mrs. Harford had never been able to circulate the small change of family affection in her home, the "atmosphere" in St. Chad's grew increasingly cold.

The encounter with her mother over "Jude the Obscure," followed by Adrian's sudden departure, had brought matters to a head with Rose, and marked an important stage in her development. She would not wait any longer for things to happen. From now onward she would take an active part in life, frame her own destiny. As a slight change from the Sisters, she welcomed the society of a certain acid spinster called Miss Walker—a friend of her mother's—who was a suffragist of advanced views and some standing among her co-religionists. It was also another way of getting at Mrs. Harford; and Rose began to read the most appalling works, justifying them by Miss Walker's recommendation. Rose in this way became an expert in "vice." She absorbed books on the White Slave Traffic, and what she did not know about masculine immorality, and "man-made laws," and Miss Josephine Butler, and State-endowed motherhood was not worth knowing. From White Slave handbooks she advanced to the philosophy of her subject, and read all

kinds of learned works lent her by Miss Walker, making a point of discussing them with her mother. In fact, she rubbed Miss Walker in. Mrs. Harford found life very difficult indeed. She asked the advice of various clergymen, even of Father Martin. Father Martin's counsel was short and to the point: "She needs the society of men of her own age. Rose is essentially a man's woman. Adrian Corbet had an excellent influence on her." After this, Mrs. Harford went home and invited Miss Walker to tea. She had her principles.

The fact that Rose filled up the time which hung heavy on her hands by pretending to follow her mother's lead did not mean that her own ideas on life had in any way changed, or that she intended to give up Adrian. Adrian would not have minded much if Rose *had* given him up, since life in Fitzroy Street was completely absorbing; but Rose had no intention of letting him escape. By playing on his compassion, she got him to take her out to tea at least one afternoon a week. To please him, she had begun to take an interest in pictures, and they used to meet in one of the rooms in the National Gallery.

One bleak afternoon in December, about two months after Adrian's departure from Hampstead, when Rose met him in the Gallery and noted his look of health and happiness, and his well-cut clothes, the contrast between all that he repre-

sented and the dullness of the life she had left behind her at Hampstead was almost unnerving. She had an instinct to throw herself into his arms, to make herself desirable to him, and then to give herself, if only he would take her away. She knew she must be desirable. . . . Often it seemed to her that Adrian found her so, but she instinctively divined something which kept them apart. He had honourable scruples, and didn't think he was "in love" with her. To her rather cold-hearted and yet sensual nature "love" seemed somehow a little ridiculous.

Rose greeted Adrian, as he stood by Botticelli's Venus and Mars, with a spontaneous warmth. She was frankly overjoyed to see him: a fact which her cousin noticed with delight. There was nothing in the world he liked so much as being liked, and Rose made a note of this for future reference.

"Oh, Adrian," she said, "there you are, my dear! You can't think how awful it is now you are gone. There's simply nothing to do; I'm bored to distraction. I shall die if I don't escape from it soon, and I'm thinking of learning to shorthand-typewrite and of coming in to London to live on my own! It wasn't so bad when *you* were there; but now . . .!"

Adrian looked at the girl with new interest. She was almost embarrassingly affectionate. They took a taxi to some tea-rooms in Bond Street,

and Rose nestled affectionately against him, skilled, instinctively, in the art of those minute contacts by which "nice women" achieve so much more than their cruder sisters.

Under the influence of tea and cigarettes, a comfortable arm-chair, and the sentimental music of a violinist, Adrian's mood became expansive, and he talked of his life in Fitzroy Street and his successes as a writer. Rose made a note of the periodicals which had printed his works, and vowed—like a true descendant of the deathless Becky—that she would get them all and read them.

"I can't help being worried about your giving up your curacy, though," said Rose, making obeisance to Tradition. "And I can't help thinking it was all my fault through having borrowed 'Jude.'"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Adrian. "I oughtn't to have let you have the book. Your mother was perfectly right! But apart from that, I was glad of the excuse to end an impossible position." . . .

"But 'Jude' is a splendid book!" said Rose with wide eyes, rather aghast at his unexpected attitude.

"Yes, but you were too young for it!" he said chaffingly.

"Oh, rot!" she pouted. "I'm twenty-four; and this isn't the Victorian era. The 'young person' had quite gone out before I was born.

In any case, I'm a grown woman and old enough to know as much as men know."

"How would you like your Sunday-school class and the Band of Hope to hear you talking like this?" Adrian mocked.

"Men are hopelessly dense!" Rose replied sententiously. "You've known me ages now, Adrian, and yet you haven't begun to know me at all. All women have to pretend to be different from what they really are. Prudery and all that is all a pretence—a pretence that comes natural: I can't tell you why. In my own home I just *have* to be keen on Church work and all that."

Adrian handed her a cigarette, and she changed the subject, by telling him for the first time of her smoking exploits at school. Somehow, this story disquieted him, as he came to realize what an ingrained humbug she was. He hoped she did not think him the same. At least, he had tried his best, while he was at it, to be a good Christian. Rose's naïve revelation of insincerity afflicted him as he realized that religion was still to him a vital matter. His conscience had not altogether been stilled. It required an effort of his will to recapture his emancipated point of view. He was given to these sudden twinges of an exposed moral nerve, and he recalled sometimes Father Martin's farewell words to him: "Faith has a way of turning up when you least expect her. . . . Don't you be too certain that you have

dodged your faith." He was glad when Rose left the topic.

"If only mother could see me now," she said, smiling at him deliciously, and parting her lips to let a little puff of grey smoke escape. She looked supremely happy, and it was a delight to Adrian to see so much honest pleasure. The excitement of being surrounded by the kind of people who interested her—girls in beautiful clothes, with elegant and opulent male companions—went to her head. Her hazel eyes were limpid and brilliant; her face glowed with a delicate colour; her whole body radiated contentment, and to Adrian her appearance was a revelation. If he had only *liked* her more, she would have made his head swim; and even as it was, he felt an almost overmastering desire to take hold of her and kiss her.

"I shall be miserable for a week, after this," she said. "That's the worst of having just a glimpse of the good things. You can't think how awful it is to want to go to Paris and Vienna, and Trouville, and Monte Carlo, and to know amusing people, and go to dances and plays. I'm sick to death of a stuffy suburb full of stuffy people, with their twopenny-farthing stuffy thoughts. . . . I'm a Suffragette; but I'd chuck the 'cause' to-morrow to become an actress, in mother's meaning of the word! I want to wear decent clothes, and meet decent people. I'm

tired of being good, Adrian. I want to be really bad."

This unexpected outburst of candour from his usually prudish cousin made Rose, in Adrian's eyes, seem much more pathetic and exciting. What a shame it was that, owing to her sex and the circumstances of her life, she should be confined a prisoner until some husband should come along with the key of her cell! He altered his usual plan of depositing her in a tube, and suggested driving her back in a taxi to within a safe distance of her home.

"It's beastly bad luck on girls," he remarked rather lamely, "but you won't have to wait long for your good time. A husband will come and carry you off and make you happy; and then you'll see all the life you want!"

"A husband!" echoed Rose. "One of James's sidesman-stockbroker friends, or some half-baked curate. Marrying one of them would only be 'out of the frying-pan.'" And supposing that I don't want to marry? Why shouldn't I be able to enjoy life as much as others, as much as men can, without? Girls are just as self-controlled and able to take care of themselves as men are. It's a shame, and I'm just sick of it!"

As the taxi hurried through the damp streets, after passing through the glaring shopping centre of Oxford Circus to the comparative obscurity of the streets beyond, Adrian felt a sudden wave

of emotion come over him. Rose looked so pretty, wrapped up in her furs, and so passionate. He put his arm round her, and when he kissed her she returned his embrace with an almost disquieting abandonment. Could it be, he thought, that she really loved him? He had never, to do himself justice, believed it possible that she could really care. He felt painfully conscious that his own heart was fixed on a blonde witch who could do what she liked with him. It was an impossible situation. He felt more than a bit of a knave, though it was largely inexperience of women which had landed him in the present quandary. He had always understood that girls (of his own class, at all events) were passionless creatures, requiring untiring efforts to awaken them to more than a tepid affection. The idea that he had made a sudden conquest was intoxicating to his masculine vanity, but disquieting. What would Queen Elizabeth think of him for behaving like this? Already she was his ideal, and the thought of not being true to her—though they were still the merest acquaintances—was agonizing. Adrian was glad when the journey came to an end. He wished Nature wouldn't play such tricks with poor, well-meaning human beings! And he liked the final passionate good-bye kiss which Rose gave him, terribly. His own ardour was considerable. But as he drove back to Fitzroy Street his conscience gave him hell.

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER Adrian had spent a few months with Guy, sharing his studio and meeting his many friends, the peculiar charm of Fitzroy Square began to penetrate his consciousness. Before he came to live in it, he had always pictured that indefinite wilderness which lies within the angle formed by the Euston Road and the Tottenham Court Road as a lamentable foreign slum, full of cheap lodging-houses, and vaguely suggestive of the murder of Polish prostitutes by commercial travellers. The Euston Road he had thought of as being the home of all that was most hideous in life—of disorderly hotels, tenth-rate prostitution, nasty “Surgical Stores,” and cheap Italian eating-houses. When he first joined Guy in Fitzroy Street he was filled with gloomy forebodings. The legend “*Chambres Meublées à louer*,” scrawled on bits of cardboard and put in the window above a hundred dejected doorways, certainly seemed to suggest a leaven of French-speaking people ; but the greasy dagoes he encountered in the streets looked far less often like Frenchmen than like the lowest continental sweepings from Brussels, Warsaw, or Naples. The quarter, on Adrian’s first days of exploration,

seemed to be full of obscure commercial undertakings—ominous manufacturing chemists, Polish milliners and ladies' tailors, French polishers, ostrich-feather merchants, registry office for Swiss waiters, purveyors of atrocious *delicatessen*, little hospitals for horrible diseases.

Gradually, however, these sinister first impressions were dispersed, and he caught the curious cosmopolitan note of the locality, which combined with its air of vanished splendour, gives it its charm. He found that all the dagoes weren't as greasy as they looked, and that there was plenty of laughter and character even among the alien waiters. And acquaintance with Madame Mirbeau, and an occasional encounter with friends of hers who lived in the neighbourhood, helped to indicate what kindly souls they might be who offered to let those gloomy-looking "*chambres meublées*."

Further acquaintance with the shops in the district also revealed many which had a pleasing character of their own, and were far from sinister. One of these was at the western end of Northampton Street—a shop for "artists' requisites," second-hand picture-frames, and sham "old Masters," kept by an elderly Irishman named O'Neill. Here, amid bottles of Vibert's "*Vernis à Retoucher*," linseed-oil, turpentine, and Japan gold size, the most amazing collection of old paintings and carved gilt frames were stacked

in separate heaps, waiting until some really sympathetic customer should ask to be shown them. When this happened, the canvases—most of which had been bought from the neighbouring houses, at sales, in the days of their decline—were hastily fitted into any frames that would hold them, and held up for admiration. Luke O'Neill's "Botticellis" were famous in the quarter, and his attributions became more and more courageous as the years went by. "You're as bad as a French provincial Musée, Mr. O'Neill," Guy said to him one day, jestingly. "And you haven't even the excuse of local patriotism!"

"Oh, Mr. Bridges, sir," retorted Luke, "shure and it's when you are as old as I am that you'll begin to know a genuine Titian when you see one—and not before! Don't you be laughing at me, Mr. Bridges, sir!"

Luke was one of the best-loved characters in the neighbourhood, but another who ran him close in popularity was a certain evil Italian, who kept a greasy restaurant in the Euston Road. Luigi squinted abominably, and had done three months for knifing a lady friend (*La Fragoletta*). He had, however, a rich and attractive personality, and possessed a very robust tenor, with which he was constantly rendering excerpts from Verdi or Donizetti. He had an astonishing capacity for endowing himself with romantic attributes, but was withal subject to a sense of humour which came

to him in spasms and burst over him volcanically in great gusts. While he stood by the side of his sizzling zinc geyser, which produced the tea and coffee, "fresh made for each person," wiping cups and saucers with a filthy napkin, he would fancy himself an anarchist of the blood-and-guts description. His dark eyes would flash fire and he would stamp his foot in an abstracted way, living over again the *scena* which had earned him his famous sentence at the Middlesex Assizes. If, in the middle, one of his favoured English customers chanced to come into the eating-house, he would pull himself suddenly together, wink, and emit a most engaging, wheezy laugh. He was extremely fat, and his surname (by which he had first brought down on himself the attentions of the Squash) was Zuccarelli.

The longer Adrian lived in Fitzroy Street the more clearly did he realize the untrustworthiness of superficial judgments. The poor, for instance, even the unwashed poor, were by no means uniformly unsavoury; nor was every pallid Belgian as odious as he appeared. Poverty, he discovered, far from killing personality, shows it up.

The quarter came to have a positive glamour for Adrian as the weeks went by: a glamour which was increased when he saw men of genius, whose work had thrilled two continents, gravely saluting one another with their backs to the Upsilon Dépôt. The artists of the quarter were,

indeed, most impressive, and—as Madame Mirbeau's charwoman used to say of the world—"were made up of all sorts." The fashion of one school (or generation) was to present the appearance of a Sacred Personage, and with beard, flowing robes, sandals, and long hair, to introduce a quasi-monastic element into the life of the Square. The motto of their order, however, was understood—particularly on Saturday nights—to be *Fais ce que Voudra*, so that no one had occasion to be depressed by them. Then there was a younger set—vaguer than their monastic elders—who, in the course of absinthine ecstasies at the Café Royal had got the whole question of costume entangled. These would wear grey flannel trousers and dancing pumps, with perhaps a black coat buttoned tactfully up to the neck, and their hair plaited and coiled round the head and kept in place by long hairpins.

Then again there was another and more serious race of men—a race apart, dwellers in geometrical altitudes, manipulators of cubes. These set their faces sternly against frivolity, and all absurdities of dress. Imitating the refined mufti of the out-of-work Belgian waiter (that industrious class), they brought a welcome touch of sobriety to the quarter with their patent-leather shoes, check trousers, neat black alpaca jackets, stiff white shirts, ready-made bow ties, and limp grey-felt hats. . . .

The Devil's House, having—as each group of artists was at pains to impress on its inmates —“absolutely no artistic convictions whatever,” formed neutral territory on which members of the various factions could safely meet. Specimens of nearly every school of painter of which the Square could boast were usually to be found collected together on Sunday evenings in its big studio. Adrian thoroughly enjoyed these informal parties, and, indeed, the more he saw of the Squash, the more he loved them. With Elizabeth Moore, in particular, he struck up a firm friendship, and it was she who, after he had been with Guy in Fitzroy Street for about four months, invited him to join them, and finally, decided him to make his permanent abode in Fitzroy Square.

He was sitting one raw January morning in Guy's deepest arm-chair, smoking a cigarette and looking through a book of travels which an indulgent editor had given him to review, when the momentous invitation reached him. Guy had started out immediately after breakfast on one of the mysterious and lonely expeditions to which he was addicted, and Adrian had the rooms to himself. His chair was drawn up by the fire, and he was just succeeding in concentrating his thoughts on the book in front of him when he heard a light step on the footpath outside. The front door opened, there was the swish of skirts on the staircase, and then to his delight

the radiant form of Queen Elizabeth appeared before him. She sank into Guy's chair and looked across at him, laughing.

"I've been sent to deliver an ultimatum!" she began. "We have decided that we can't allow you to go on living with Guy any longer. You are fearfully bad for him, and he hasn't done any work at all since you came. Besides, there's another reason. Madame Mirbeau insists on trying to let one of the two spare bedrooms—the one next mine on the top floor—and unless you come and take it, we shall get a horrid outsider whom we don't like!"

"Is that an invitation, Moore?" Adrian asked, with ill-concealed pleasure.

"No, it's a command!" said Queen Elizabeth. "Come on; I'll help you pack your pyjamas, and we'll leave a note on Guy's pillow to say you've eloped."

There was a haunting contralto note in her laughter, which was individual and infectious. How finely she held her head, Adrian thought, and what a complexion! It was the fairest and purest he had ever seen: both her neck and forehead were a dazzling, snowy white. Her expression in repose was one of subdued animation, like a woman in one of Gainsborough's portraits: when she laughed humour rippled all over her face and her eyes danced. They were blue eyes, brave and open, and she had a way of looking at a

man which showed him the muddiness of his own soul. Her personality had so impressed itself on Adrian's mind at their first meeting that she had hardly been out of his thoughts since. The thing which he would most have liked in the world was to live in the same house and to come into daily contact with this splendid creature. And now it was being offered to him !

"Oh, I'll come like a shot," he said, "if you think the Squash will approve of me. I rather think Guy would sooner have the place to himself, though he won't hear of me getting rooms elsewhere when I suggest moving."

"Good !" replied Elizabeth. "I knew you'd come. Now we must pack. Your bedroom is upstairs, isn't it?" She got up and went to the floor above, with Adrian following, tried all the doors till she found his room, and proceeded to unearth his suit-cases from beneath the pile of books and clothes which encumbered them.

In a few minutes Adrian saw his various suits laid out on his bed, and watched with a kind of fascination as Elizabeth folded the sleeves of his coats, and put them into the open cases.

"Don't think much of your underclothes," she remarked ; "they're extravagant, and there aren't enough of them. You don't seem to have any ties. Let us see if Guy has anything worth stealing."

She led the way down again into Bridges'

bedroom, and turned the contents of his two corner-drawers on to his bed.

"Here are some single collars that he won't miss, and at least two ties; we had better have some of his evening ties as well," she went on meditatively, "and then I think we shall manage."

Armed with the spoil, she returned to Adrian's already bulging suit-cases, and compressed their cargo, getting Adrian to sit on them and strap them up.

"Now come and see your room," she said. "The whole thing will cost you a guinea a week, so that only means one article accepted every Thursday by a perfect gentleman. 'Perfect gentleman' is our name for an editor who pays."

"Hullo, Queen, have you got him?" was the cry which greeted them on entering the Devil's House.

"Naturally," replied Elizabeth. "I took him by force; here he is."

"Loud cheers!" said the Squash as one man, and greeted Corbet severally, and with evident pleasure.

"We'll have a bottle of the best up from the cellar to-night," drawled Hugh Winterton. "I think we ought to have a 'celebration' and get fellows in, and wear beautiful clothes. I want Dilly to love me, and I'm sure she won't in a Norfolk jacket, though I'm an Apollo in a bathing suit. Ain't I, Queen?"

“Hugh is our barman,” explained Elizabeth to Corbet. “You see, he is so rich and fat, and good-natured, and likes drawing corks !”

Adrian found his room was of a comfortable size, sufficiently furnished, and spotlessly clean. The floor was bare and polished, as in a French bedroom, though there was a strip of matting by the bedside; the window looked out on to Northampton Street, and by putting his head out of it he could just see the trees in the Square. An ancient chest of drawers, surmounted by a bookcase (a composite piece of furniture similar to that which is found in the smaller hotels for students in the Latin Quarter of Paris), a table, and a capacious arm-chair completed the furniture. There were no pictures on the walls, but on the centre panel of the door some former occupant of the room had painted, as if to mitigate his celibacy, the figure of a girl. Adrian was very sensitive to the atmosphere of rooms, and sniffed at this one with sensitive nose. It attracted and eluded him; it was exciting. It made him feel more than ever like a freshman. He could not imagine how he could ever have been as old as he was when he was eighteen. While he was putting his shirts and collars into the drawers and his books on the shelves, he noticed with approval that the electric light was just over the bed, and the switch within reach of the pillow. It was a good room !

Just before dinner, when he was sitting smoking in front of his fire, there was a sharp knock, and Queen Elizabeth entered, accompanied by an old woman, whose dark hair, streaked with grey, was curled over her head and gathered up in a neat knob. Her face was yellow and wrinkled, and she had a black moustache, but her brown eyes, half puckered up and giving her a slightly Japanese appearance, were bright and alert. She stood smiling in the room, with folded arms, until Elizabeth introduced Corbet.

“Madame Mirbeau, let me present Mr. Corbet,” said she in French. Then to Adrian: “This is Madame la Patronne, who looks after us. She is a perfect dear!”

Madame Mirbeau gave Adrian a hearty “shake-hand” and looked at him shrewdly.

“Ah! but it is good to be young,” she remarked, *à propos des bottes*. “When I was her age,” she pinched Elizabeth’s cheeks, “I was more beautiful than Ingres’ model for ‘La Source.’ I have pictures—you shall see them—in my kitchen.”

In her youth, as Elizabeth explained, she had kept house for a number of painters who occupied successively a modest but clean *appartement* near the Boulevard de la Rochechouart. Her duties had been to keep them amused and well fed, to inspire them, and to mend their clothes, and for ten or fifteen years she had lived respected and beloved by several men of genius

—one at a time, be it understood, for Madame was of a respectability. Her lovers had painted her in various attitudes, and a picture of herself as a young girl, standing by a window through which a ray of sunlight fell on her exquisitely proportioned body was one of those which adorned her kitchen. It was by a famous painter, and he had managed to convey all the freshness of springtime in her look, and all the joyousness of the world on a summer morning, of youth, and sunshine in the lighting of the figure, and in her pose and expression. As an altar-piece in a Pagan temple the picture would have been admirable, so that as an adornment to the Devil's House it was not out of place. Madame Mirbeau was immensely proud of it herself. It had been painted by her first lover a few weeks after they had set up house-keeping together, and one of her other lovers had given her the beautiful eighteenth-century gilded Venetian frame. She guarded her souvenirs with the utmost care, and it was only on great occasions that she would show her more carefully preserved treasures: mostly sketches and paintings of herself, some of them signed by names known wherever Art has penetrated.

She now complacently looked back upon herself as she had been nearly half a century before, chuckling with satisfaction at the memory of her dead loves.

“She used to be the *P’tit amie* of Dujardin, you know,” said Elizabeth in reverential tones, “and then of Cottin and several other painters. She used to darn their socks for them, and save their money, and keep their rooms tidy, and wait on them hand and foot. . . . You darling, they ought to give you the Cross of the Legion of Honour! . . . She’s really *done* something for Art. You must show Mr. Corbet the Cottins,” Elizabeth added enthusiastically, turning again to Madame Mirbeau, who beamed benignly under this *foison* of compliments. “They are perfectly lovely!”

Madame Mirbeau sighed portentously, then smiled again.

“Ah oui, pour celles qui ont eu des amants la vieillesse n’est pas cruelle. Elles peuvent garder des souvenirs épatants!”

On this note she bowed and withdrew.

“I say, what are you going to wear?” said Elizabeth, when they were left alone. “You mustn’t wear clothes, you must wear a pillow-slip or something to-night, or disguise yourself as a Red Indian. Hugh’s buying heaps of champagne, and we’re all going to behave disgracefully. As it’s in honour of your visit, you’ll have to wear something specially good. Let me see if you’ve got anything exciting in the way of pyjamas. I didn’t notice any when I packed for you.”

She went to his chest of drawers and turned over the clothes with eager fingers.

“What a rotten lot!” she lamented. “Hullo, though, what’s this?” As she spoke, from underneath a pile of flannel shirts she produced a pale green and mauve silk sleeping suit. “Here’s a find! If you haven’t a costume of woad, or a tiger-skin, or a pearl necklace, you must come in these,” commanded Elizabeth. “Put your feet in woolly slippers and have a fine Byronic disorder about your hair.”

“Oughtn’t we to have garlands of roses,” suggested Adrian eagerly. Elizabeth clapped her hands.

“That’s a good notion. Hugh, come here, you fat boy,” she called down the stairs, the thrilling contralto note appearing again in her voice. Winterton’s lumbering form appeared in answer to her call. He was disguised already as a Folly, and with his enormous bulk might have been mistaken for *feu* M. Pélissier. He bowed before Elizabeth and spread out his hands.

“Hugh,” she said eagerly, “Corbet has had a splendid idea. We want at least a dozen wreaths of roses. *Do* be a darling and order them from the florist, so that we can wear them at dinner.”

“Woman, I go!” replied Hugh, with a very good imitation of the voice and manner of M. Pélissier imitating “Sir Burban Tree.” “But, remember, there will be a day of reckoning.”

“I’m off too,” said Elizabeth, “to make myself look nice. Dinner is at eight : mind your appearance is a success.”

The dining-room of the Devil’s House was as stately as the drawing-room above it. In the days of dark wall-papers, “gasoliers,” and mahogany, it had probably been quite gloomy enough to form a setting even for early Victorian Academicians. The Squash, however, had abolished all relics of a melancholy if respectable past, and restored the room perhaps to more than its original beauty. The clean white walls and the not too “fauve” fauvism of the pictures which hung on them, the polished black table and chairs and the bright red window curtains combined to give an effect that was both vivid and curiously gay.

At eight o’clock Madame Mirbeau’s mellow voice was heard through the house, “*Le dîner est servi, mes enfants,*” and doors of bedrooms opened, and steps were heard in the passages and on the stairs, together with peals of laughter. Emerging diffidently in his green and mauve silk garments, fluffy slippers, and Byronic hair, Adrian was startled at the sight which met his eyes. The inmates of the house, almost unrecognizable now, were on their way downstairs to dinner. In the van was Hugh Winterton as a Folly, with a minute garland of roses over one eye (or rather one pane of his spectacles), and carrying a long black wand in one hand; behind him came Dilly, dressed

principally in a tiger-skin and sandals, her beautiful red hair adorned with vine-leaves. She was followed by Maurice, who was dressed as a dandy of the early nineteenth century, with a silvery top-hat not entirely obscuring his long black hair, a negligently tied black scarf, and a general air of abandon. While Adrian was wondering where Elizabeth was and what she would look like, she appeared from her room, radiant under the light. She was wearing a thin white silk shirt tucked into blue satin Turkish trousers, and her bare feet were pushed into red Turkish slippers turned up at the toes and fringed with beads. Her bright, animated blue eyes, fresh lips, and pure, fair skin gave her an almost unearthly look : to Adrian she seemed like a woman compounded merely of light and fire.

Dinner that night was the merriest and most irresponsible meal that Adrian could remember. It was madder and more absurd than the maddest of his Oxford nights had been. Madame Mirbeau surpassed herself in her cuisine. Her *Salade Russe*, her omelettes, her tournedos, and her "*Coupe Elizabeth*" were worthy companions to Hugh's Pol Roger 1904.

"Look at my little pink toes," said Elizabeth in a stage whisper to Adrian, who sat next to her, "I've rouged them." She showed him the tiniest pink and white foot as she spoke, and slipped it into his hand for a brief instant. She made a

queer little sly face at him as she did so : it was their " secret." Certainly for Adrian the chief delight of the dinner lay in being able to watch Elizabeth, and to listen to her rippling, musical laugh with the contralto note in it, which made little shivers run down his spine. Since he had been staying in Fitzroy Street he had seen Elizabeth constantly, and the more he sought her out the more pleased she had been. But she was always as natural as a wild thing. She did not, in one sense, keep him sufficiently at bay to make a flirtation possible : in another sense, although he was sure she liked him, he felt as though an intangible but insurmountable barrier was between them. In the middle of dinner, as he looked round the table, the thought suddenly came to him that less than six months ago at this very hour he was talking to odious small boys in the club-room attached to St. Philemon's, watching them play bagatelle or " beggar my neighbour." Emancipated as he prided himself on being, yet the sense of doing something naughty was there to add to the zest of his enjoyment of the contrast. He had the literary man's love of contrast : it was a word that he rolled on his tongue like a vintage wine, from which he extracted the full savour and bouquet. But the piquancy of the contrast in the present case was summed up in Elizabeth. She was enslaving him, that girl, he thought, and with a luxurious indolence he offered

no resistance. She was in herself a perpetual, always fresh contrast to all other girls. To his eye there was something elfin about her : she was so naïve and unself-conscious—her thoughts seemed to make quick darts like swallows, sailing up oddly into speech which captivated and abashed. And she was daring ! But always successfully. There was always the reserve of her own fineness to save her from a *bêtise*. She made quick sallies, but the drawbridge was up in an instant, though—so rich was her humour and so fine her sensibility—no one but the veriest clod could have attempted the escalade. Always she was Queen Elizabeth.

After dinner they went up into the studio, and Guy Bridges, together with about a dozen other friends of both sexes, dropped in.

“I see you’ve bagged my friend and most of my clean linen, Elizabeth,” Guy remarked, laughing. “I suppose you commanded and he gave in. Well, I don’t wonder if you smiled at him like that.”

Elizabeth tripped up to Bridges, and, standing on tiptoe, she lifted up her face and kissed him below the ear.

“You didn’t mind, did you?” she whispered.

Hugh by this time had opened the little Bord piano in the corner, and began playing the waltz from “The Girl from Utah.”

“Chuck the easels into the corner !” he cried. After moving them (with extreme care), every one began to dance. Adrian was not able to capture

Elizabeth until two dances later, but eventually, and with rapture, he held her in his arms. Her lithe, supple figure needed no artificial support. She seemed like a fairy in her soft silk shirt, which fell open at the neck and showed a little of her dazzling bosom and shoulders. A tall visitor with a single eyeglass succeeded Hugh at the piano and began "Rêve de Rosette" more in the manner of a musician than of one used to the requirements of dancers. He played the insidious tune very slowly.

"I suppose the Rosette is the lady in 'Mlle. de Maupin,' " said Elizabeth with a smile, "though perhaps her dreams would have been more unbridled than this."

"Oh, you strange creature!" said Adrian. "This is quite unbridled enough. I think you are made of wine and roses and laughter, and the little wavelets of the sea, and that you were a squirrel and a swallow first before you were a woman. Anyhow, I'm quite desperately enough in love with you."

She looked up at him railingly, as they bostoned into a corner and out again.

"Why, Adrian, I really believe you do like me a bit. How jolly of you!"

She pressed herself close up to him and kissed his cheek and ear (just, he reflected in a flash, as she had kissed Guy). It was a little fairy-like embrace—a kiss not of the body but of the spirit.

It made him—so great a revelation was it of purity—almost inclined to cry. And it had the effect for the time being (intended perhaps) of checking his sentimentality, through which he was in danger of striking the wrong note.

The dance was kept up intermittently until after one, when no one could be found to play any more waltzes. Adrian only danced once again with Elizabeth, who was constantly surrounded by the men who had come in from the other studios. When the visitors began to take their leave, however, she beckoned to Adrian, who was looking out of the window and smoking a cigarette.

“Go and get your latch-key,” she said, “and let’s go for a stroll ; and bring me the fur coat that’s on my bed, there’s a dear.”

To Adrian, the act of entering Elizabeth’s room was like going into the Holy of Holies : it was the shrine which contained all that he held dear. They walked into the Square and across the glaring and noisy Tottenham Court Road, to the comparative stillness of Gower Street. It was very cold, but the moon was shining over the roofs of the University Hospital and the Slade School, with an almost sinister effulgence.

“What a night !” said Adrian. “This doesn’t seem like London or England at all. Think of the City Temple and Whitefield’s Tabernacle and all the furniture-shops, under a moon like this. How they must be transfigured !”

“Yes, and what a deep, dark blue it makes the night seem by contrast,” said Elizabeth.

She paused for a moment, and looked through the railings at the dome and classical colonnades of London University, which looked almost as romantic in the moonlight as a Greek temple. “That’s where I spent some of the happiest and most useless years of my existence,” Elizabeth remarked. “I suppose you feel much the same about Oxford, don’t you?”

Adrian, as it happened, didn’t feel like that about Oxford—not yet, at any rate. However, in view of Guy’s outburst and a certain growing conviction within him that the last of his illusions was on the point of cracking, he was not at all sure that he mightn’t before very long. The world seemed to have grown unaccountably larger during the last few months, and Oxford, proportionately, to have shrunk.

Elizabeth shivered a little under her coat, and they strolled slowly back to Northampton Street. The others had all, apparently, gone off to bed, and they sat for a few minutes by the dying fire in the studio before following them. Elizabeth seemed to be, for her, rather melancholy. As he watched her dear bent head, he wanted to press his lips to the little stretch of warm, white neck which he could just see under the collar of her coat. He didn’t venture, and the opportunity passed. Elizabeth raised her head, smiled,

and announced that she was going to bed. They climbed together up the unlighted stairs till they reached the top floor, where their bedrooms were next door to one another. Elizabeth's nearness in the silence and the darkness thrilled Adrian. He felt his self-control beginning to desert him, and when she came to the door of her room and was on the point of disappearing, he could bear it no longer, and took her fiercely in his arms, meaning to kiss her, whispering incoherent endearments. She stiffened at once, moved her head away from him, and disengaged herself from his grasp.

"Don't be a fool, Adrian!" she said. "We don't want to kiss each other all alone in the dark on the stairs. It is a horrid habit, like secret drinking! I shan't like you if you don't take care."

He was more quickly put to shame by this than he remembered to have been in his life before. What a wretched clod this little witch made one feel! Her last remark made his heart almost stop beating; but she added as she slipped into her room—

"Ah, but I *do*, though!"

CHAPTER XVII

ADRIAN'S first evening party in the Devil's House was a memorable event which inaugurated one of the happiest periods of his life. Everything was new, everything delightful, and he discovered secrets about himself which surprised him. The change from the dreary atmosphere of parish work at St. Philemon's was still fresh enough to be exciting, and his feeling of combined naughtiness and emancipation had not yet deserted him. And then, with it, there came the birth of his own creative instinct, and the joys of hard work in a difficult art. Thoughts of Rose became half unconsciously connected with thoughts of the unpleasant sides of life, on which he had turned his back. The cleavage between his old and his new ideals, thoughts, ways of life became more and more marked. He was of an impressionable nature, and the influence on him of his daily contact with "the Squash"—and particularly with Elizabeth Moore—was profound.

After the occasion when he had taken Rose out to the Bond Street tea-shop, and embraced her in the taxi, he had felt profoundly uneasy.

The inaugural dinner at the Squash and his growing love for Queen Elizabeth made him anxious to forget Rose as much as possible. To Rose's chagrin he became colder instead of more impassioned, and showed signs of wanting to "plant" her, which she determined to circumvent. The reason he gave for his preoccupation was in part true. He was actually working at feverish pressure at his new profession, and his absorption in journalism and in writing was genuine enough.

Father Martin had kept his promise, and given him an introduction to Lord Bridley, which had proved to be of great service. The strange old man had interviewed Adrian in his house in St. James's Square, and given him letters to the editors of several of his papers, which resulted in his getting regular work. As Adrian was well qualified by education and temperament for what is called (by some of its practitioners) "the higher journalism," and had a natural gift for expressing himself on paper, he did very well. Moreover, literary people still had a glamour for him. He had not lost any of his enthusiasms, any of his passion for ideas, or any of his disinterested devotion to art; and it gave him a distinct thrill to come into daily contact with men whose work he admired. The patronage of Lord Bridley, combined with the facts that the editors of Lord Bridley's papers took a fancy to him, enabled him to plunge as it were head-first

into literary society. There everything, to his unaccustomed eyes, seemed radiant, every one was to be admired or overrated. When he had time, he spent hours receiving cups of tea from not-too-well-washed literary hands. At the Squash, also, he met literary people, about whom, however, there was more talent and less "society." The poets who shared Maurice Greene's drinks were frankly unshaven—but several of them wrote poetry. Maurice himself, apart from his poses, had a genuine gift, and a circle of friends who believed in him and appreciated it. At intermittent intervals Adrian realized that more true "literary artists" frequented Madame Mirbeau's modest establishment than were to be found at any of the third-rate Kensington dinner-tables which he was so pleased to adorn. It was at the Devil's House also—and not at Mrs. Pattison-Warner's *art nouveau* Knightsbridge flat or at Lady Bodstein's barrack in Lowndes Square—that he got what looked like being the chance of his life.

Among the authors who used to visit the Squash *en famille* on Sunday evenings was Herman Mainwaring, the novelist. Although successful, and rich, Mainwaring had not been able to cure himself of a romantic passion for the Pure Idea, for all art that was splendid but unprofitable. It was characteristic of him that he had founded a monthly periodical of the most hopelessly

uncommercial type, on which for years past he had lost money, with a reckless pride. "It pleases me, that kind of thing," he would quote, when friends remonstrated. He didn't see why he shouldn't publish his silly paper for fun, if he wanted to. (This was at a period when *épater le bourgeois* was still a catchword.) The paper was called *The Monocle*; its note, a haughty and aristocratic insolence; its price half-a-crown. Mainwaring eventually celebrated his fortieth birthday and realized that there was no point in being insolent, and middle-aged as well. Also he was not a "faunist"; and as he had lived at Munich for several years he couldn't accept the much-advertised "originality" of early post-impressionism as anything but a rather clumsy fraud. He was no longer young, that was it! His heart was young enough, but on the whole *les jeunes* bored him. Also his last few books had not sold as well as he had hoped.

Decidedly it was the moment to get rid of *The Monocle*. He would seek out suitable young men to be insolent in his place. It was with these thoughts in his head that he called on the Squash and offered Adrian and Maurice his white elephant. To give him his due, he did not attempt to sell it as a paying concern, with magnificent prospects. "It loses about a thousand a year," he admitted. "But London is full of half-baked millionaires, who like to patronize the arts. Their

wives enjoy having poets to tea, and talking about Maurice Maeterlinck. You can easily find some one to stand the racket for you. So there you are if you want it! I shall only run the thing for another two numbers if it isn't taken over!"

The idea of editing a magazine ran through Adrian's brain like wildfire, and even roused Maurice out of his alcoholic languor. When Mainwaring had departed they sat up discussing it, they discussed it all the next day, and in the evening went off in a body to the Café de l'Orient to discuss it further. As they were her most cherished habitués, Mme. Rousseau, the *patronne*, came in smiling from her little kitchen, exclaiming, "Bonjour, mes enfants, comment allez-vous?" and giving them each in turn her fat left hand and bright smile.

The little party nearly filled the small salle à manger, with its green-painted walls, its two marble-topped tables, and its three deal dining-tables, the cheap clock, and the advertisements of a Belgian touring club. After dinner they sat round the fire at one corner of the room drinking their excellent coffee—served delightfully with a cigarette on one saucer and a little pile of sugar on another. Then again the great project was talked over.

Both M. and Mme. Rousseau took a keen interest in the Squash, whom they loved dearly, as the children they had never been

able to afford to have, and if they ever ventured to rub off one of Hugh's drawings from his marble table, they always drew his attention invitingly to the cleaned surface. Their interest in the art of their adopted children was indeed absorbing, and Monsieur prided himself on being able to detect real talent. To Dilly they were kind, encouraging, and non-committal; to Hugh, Elizabeth, and Guy Bridges they rendered the homage which foreigners render so gracefully to talent. As they could neither read nor speak a word of English, the abilities of Maurice and Adrian they had to take on trust, but they treasured scraps of paper containing verses, and once when Maurice wrote them a letter in barbarous French to put off a dinner which he had ordered, they were overjoyed and showed the precious missive, with pride, to the French waiters and clerks who formed their clientèle.

"The great thing is," said Maurice, "where, if we decide to take the paper over, are we to get the money, from?"

The Squash reviewed their aunts and uncles and various connections with lugubrious faces.

"Can't think," said Queen Elizabeth. "Do you know any one, Adrian?" she asked.

Adrian thought of poor Aunt Louisa, but dismissed her, then of Lord Bridley.

"I'll tell you what," he said. "I might try to talk to old Bridley about it. He runs most

of his papers for fun, and is keen enough on art. He might finance *The Monocle* for us for a year. Anyway, he's worth trying ! ”

The suggestion was received with acclamation. Youthful optimism already clothed Lord Bridley in the garments of a Mæcenæas.

“ Now,” said Maurice, “ comes the question of what we are to do with *The Monocle* when we have got it.”

“ That nasty grey cover will have to go,” said Hugh. “ You want something a little more striking : something done in heavy line like those fellows who used to work for l'Assiette au Beurre. What do you say to this, for instance? You might have three exquisite people wearing monocles in an upper window—a sort of Manet effect, only in line—and underneath, in the street, a procession of every sort of miscellaneous, quaint person—strong men, doctors, spinsters, charwomen, pretty girls, actors, ballet-dancers, policemen. . . . Look, this sort of thing.”

He took a pencil from his pocket, and “ *The Monocle*, a Monthly Magazine, devoted to Literature and the Arts, price 2s. 6d. net,” took shape before their eyes on the marble top of one of Madame's tables.

“ That's splendid,” said Maurice. “ I suppose you would do it in black, on a pale biscuit-coloured paper, and frame the design in a heavy black border? ”

"That's it," said Hugh. "I'll rough it out to-night, when I get home."

"Oh, won't we give the public what it jolly well doesn't want, and won't stand," said Queen Elizabeth. "Maurice, you must print your most passionate purple poems and reproduce Guy's drawings of pretty ladies. And Adrian will have to write about pictures, and tell the truth about the Royal Academy and Art Schools, and the Chantrey pictures in the Tate, and MacWhirter, Farquharson & Co., and the sort of pictures that are bought by provincial galleries, and the precise value of the works of Alma Tadema."

"And perhaps we could get leave to reproduce some drawings by John, and some of Forain's work, and possibly things by Orpen and Nicholson and Fergusson, not to mention our own discoveries in the studios," said Adrian enthusiastically. "And we'll say what we jolly well please, and not give a damn for the consequences!"

"I don't believe any one will ever be able to say exactly what he thinks and feels in a London paper," said Maurice lugubriously. "We shall be able to make a good shot at free speech, though, and I'm sure London is only just waiting to be petrified with something like *The Monocle*. No intelligent person buys magazines at all now. They are all bossed by their owners," he added, in an emotional voice. "And the editors are simply clerks with all the brains and life and

enthusiasm crushed out of them by directors capable of living at Surbiton! Phew—it makes one sick! When the business man takes to messing about with literature, it's time for the artist to commit suicide! Just look at the magazines! Any decent man or woman ought to be ashamed to have one in the house!"

The Squash agreed rapturously, and "looked" at magazines with horror.

"It's evidently high time that the new *Monocle* began to quiz an astonished world," said Adrian. "The time is ripe. Every one must be waiting for us. I should not wonder if we had a huge success. There must be thousands of intelligent people who would subscribe to it!"

Adrian and Maurice, after they had returned to the Devil's House, kept the conversation up far into the next morning, and by the time they crept upstairs to their beds they had not again referred to the question of ways and means. Light-heartedly, and with the unerring instinct of youthful determination, they had no doubt concluded that the money would find itself. And, oddly enough, it did.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN reply to his brief letter to Lord Bridley asking if he could have an appointment to discuss "a literary matter," Adrian was flattered to receive an invitation to dinner on the following Saturday.

He had an appointment to meet Rose (whom he seemed now constantly to be forgetting) on that particular evening, but he put her off without compunction. Had he been in love with her, it would have been a most piquant assignation: for mere friendship it was rather exacting. So he wrote and excused himself, and arrived at the appointed time before the door of Lord Bridley's forbidding house in St. James's Square.

The butler showed him into the library, where the old man was awaiting him by a small fire, though the month was June. Adrian had thought him extraordinary at their first meeting, but now he seemed still more eccentric. He was dressed in a beautifully cut dinner jacket suit. On one of his fingers flashed a large diamond ring—"like a pawnbroker," thought Adrian at first—and in his shirt were little emerald studs surrounded by small brilliants which glittered in the candlelight. But

the oddest part of the man was his face. His hair was quite white and elaborately crimped, looking so unnatural that during dinner even the naïf Corbet suspected that it might be a wig. His wrinkled cheeks had a fresh colour, which looked almost as if it might have been artificial. His eyebrows and eyelashes were darkened, and his old eyes glittered with the borrowed fire of some tonic, and, except for its wrinkles, his complexion in colouring and general appearance might have been that of a man of forty. The effect of these arts on a worn-out body, nearly half a century older than Adrian, was almost frightful. His delicate little feet were encased in the most dainty patent shoes cut right in at the instep. He also wore a monocle, and a gardenia in his button-hole. Adrian was not able to take in all these details at a first glance, but his impressions were sufficiently startling to make him nearly lose his presence of mind. At their previous interview, which was strictly business-like, he had not noticed any of these extravagances. Staggering to his pretty feet, the old man advanced with a charming smile, disclosing a dental display, his most cherished possession, of which the years would never rob him. His greeting was, even to Adrian's simple mind, vaguely unpleasant. He took the boy's hand in his cold fingers, wound it round several times just under his chin, and gave it back with a pat.

When dinner was announced; taking his guest's arm familiarly, Lord Bridley conducted him into the dining-room. It was a lofty room, almost as big as the dining-room of a club, Adrian reflected, and the walls were hung with portraits cleverly lit by electric lights concealed in the frames, which threw an even glow over the canvases. Dinner was served at a little round table by the fire, an arrangement which accentuated the room's dimensions.

"I did not ask any one to meet you," Lord Bridley explained to Adrian. "I thought we should be able to talk more intimately *à deux*. Tell me about yourself, and about your work, and what it is you want me to be interested in?"

Under the influence of the champagne, Adrian found himself expanding. He began by talking of Father Martin's labours at St. Philemon's, to which his host gave a polite but rather half-hearted attention, and then proceeded to detail his own adventures and the work he was doing for his host's papers. At last he reached the point—which Lord Bridley seemed rather anxious for him to do—and gave a description of the Squash and a glowing account of *The Monocle*. The Squash seemed to interest Lord Bridley immensely. His old eyes shone with natural fire through the belladonna.

"Oh, do tell me more about them," he said.

“You must bring them all to see me. I am very fond of pictures, you know, and of boys and girls, too. I have some pictures upstairs which I must show you after dinner.”

Over their coffee and liqueurs, Adrian enlarged upon his journalistic projects with the optimism of youth, but all that he had to say seemed to interest his host enormously. The champagne had gone sufficiently, and not too much, to Adrian's head, and the fine wine had mellowed him.

“Let us go upstairs,” said Lord Bridley. “I want to show you my pictures.”

He led the way to the lift, and together they shot up to the top of the tall house. Emerging from the lift, Lord Bridley inserted a key into the door of an anteroom hung with beautiful Persian tapestries.

“This is my smoking-room,” he said, opening a door to the right and switching on a dozen cunningly concealed lights, which showed a long, low room with a polished parquet floor, and beautiful rugs. The furniture of the room consisted of long, light bookcases filled with French books, luxurious light cane arm-chairs, and little Turkish tables. They sat down side by side on a soft-cushioned divan, the old man and the eager boy, thinking their strangely different thoughts. It seemed too fantastic to be true, this meeting, so different from the five minutes of a busy man's

time which was all that Adrian had expected when he wrote. It had about it—in spite of its pleasantness—something of the terrifying. These disturbing thoughts disappeared from Adrian's mind in his delight at the pictures and drawings with which the walls were covered. One or two pencil drawings by John, in close proximity to one by Lautrec—testified to a catholicity of taste which the rest of the things in the room bore out. There was a fine example of Daumier's pitiless observation, a ballerina by Degas, a drawing of a railway terminus under repair by Muirhead Bone, a Rops, and two little pictures of Hampstead by Nicholson—all greys and blacks, with an immense sky, and little people like dots standing grouped round the flagstaff. These pictures attracted Adrian particularly, for something of the glamour which surrounds places seen in extreme youth seemed to have been felt and expressed in them.

There were many other delightful things in the room, and the two chatted on a subject which both found absorbing, in such a way that the difference in their ages was bridged over.

In the other room, on the farther side of the Persian ante-room, Adrian's disquietude revived. There was something repellent about this old man in spite of his fine brain, his rare appreciation of beauty. The apartment was furnished in a different way from the smoking-room: it

was more of a boudoir. Against the wall on one side stood a large, magnificently carved black Chinese bed, on which were piled a number of soft cushions. In different corners of the room, and standing on the chimney-piece, were pieces of statuary and bronzes, including two examples of the effeminate Apollo of the Praxitelean type, commonly found in Hellenistic copies. The pictures on the white walls also were chiefly reproductions of statuary. All the paintwork in the room was white. The carpet was a bright apple green, and the curtains a harmonious blue. It was a delightful room, to which the age of its owner seemed somehow an affront.

Lord Bridley handed his guest a cigarette from a silver box lined with cedarwood. He did not light one himself, but taking a silver vinaigrette from the chimney-piece, sprinkled some drops of tea-rose scent on the back of his hand and on his fine lawn handkerchief.

The old man had evidently not come to the end of the things he wanted his guest to see, for in a few moments he led the way once more to the lift. They got in, the gate clicked, and Lord Bridley pressed an electric button. Down they went in the uncanny steel trap, so well disguised within, down past the bedrooms, past the hall, down to the lower basement. It seemed to Adrian's disordered imagination that they were swooping down together, he and Mephistopheles, into some terrify-

ing secret kingdom of evil. At length, however, the lift stopped, and they got out. The passage they were in was paved with marble, and the walls were distempered a pure white, while all the woodwork was enamelled white also. Opening a door at the end of the passage, and turning on the light, the old man displayed to Adrian's astonished gaze a big room, in the centre of which was a marble swimming-bath. There was a luxurious sofa at the top of the bath, covered with one enormous towel. Matting was laid down all round it, and at one end an electric heating apparatus had been fixed.

"Now look," said Lord Bridley, turning on another switch. Immediately the water became a shimmering mass of golden light. The bath was lit from the bottom and sides by electric lights, so that the body of any one bathing would be made all golden and radiant, as one could imagine a swimmer in Pacific sunlight. Adrian could not repress a gasp of pleasure.

"What a lovely effect!" he said.

"Yes, it is clever, isn't it? I copied the idea from a grotto at Capri," Lord Bridley replied. "You must come here and have a bathe one day. You can make the water any temperature you like by that apparatus at the end there."

Lord Bridley stood and sighed as he looked at his bath, as though mourning his age and its attendant incapacities. They re-entered the lift

and returned to the library. When the butler had closed the door after bringing in the spirit-tray, they settled themselves in their chairs and discussed the great project once again.

"Now tell me more about *The Monocle*," Lord Bridley asked encouragingly, smiling with his false teeth in a way which must have been dazzling half a century before. Adrian once again elaborated the plans and hopes of the Squash, forgetting, in his enthusiasms, all his misgivings about the curious, rather pathetic old man who was treating him so kindly. On the subject of journalistic enterprises Lord Bridley spoke with authority. He knew Mainwaring, and had often seen his paper. He was not averse from acquiring it. He put one or two pertinent questions to Adrian to test his capacity for running it efficiently. He seemed to find the replies he received satisfactory.

"I have written one or two little books myself," said Lord Bridley after a pause. "Here, I will show them to you."

He took a gold key from his pocket and opened a bookcase by his side, from which he took three small volumes exquisitely bound in calf, elaborately tooled and decorated. They were volumes of poetry of an exotic character, but the author did not offer to lend them, nor seem anxious to gain a new reader. Smiling a little to himself, he took them and put them back on the shelf.

"Well, I don't mind letting you run *The Monocle* for a year," he said abruptly. "There would be room for it in the same building as the *Hour* and the *Saturday Messenger*. Wilkinson, my manager there, could publish it for you, and you could have the top floor of the building to use as offices. I've been trying to sublet it for some months and haven't succeeded. Yes, I'll give you a chance. It's a pity Mainwaring's paper should stop. . . ."

Adrian thanked him warmly, and shortly afterwards—the object of his visit apparently accomplished—he, simple-heartedly, took his leave.

"Be sure to write and send me all the particulars. Then I'll get Wilkinson to interview Mainwaring and fix it up. Good-bye!"

It was very late when Adrian got back to Fitzroy Square, and he did not go into the studio to see if any one were still awake, but went straight upstairs to his room. He sat in his arm-chair by the open window for a while, smoking a cigarette before getting into bed. As he was going over in his mind the curious events which had just taken place, he heard a faint tapping at the door.

"Come in," he uttered in surprise.

The door opened a little, and round it appeared the merry head of Queen Elizabeth.

"Can I come and hear the news, Adrian?" she said, smiling, and without further ado, and

somewhat to his consternation, she entered and sat down on his hearth-rug. When he looked at her he could see from her candid expression that she was as innocent of any provocative intention as a child in the nursery, and his consternation gave way to an immense respect. She had a light dust-coat on over her pyjamas, and sat clasping her knees. Her bright brown hair, which was done in a coil, curled round her neck and hung down over her breast, lending a charming touch of *espièglerie* to her appearance. Her feet were tucked into woolly slippers, but he could see the white flesh of her ankles, streaked with pale blue veins.

Adrian related the chief points of what had occurred, including Lord Bridley's promise, while she darted at him from time to time stealthy glances of pride which he did not see.

"How perfectly splendid!" she said. "Then he will find the money, and *The Monocle* will really be ours after all. I do think it's clever of you, Honey! . . . And if he's really a bad old man, it will do him good to spend some money in a good cause. And I don't see how he can hurt our morals. I'm sure we haven't any of us got any!" She looked up at Adrian with twinkling eyes. Oh, certainly she was a witch! He could not believe that she had not slid down through the chimney or hopped in slyly through the window. He wanted so much to kiss her as

he might have kissed a child, and stretched out an appealing arm towards her.

"I think perhaps you'd better not, Adrian, dear," she laughed, with dainty malice. She jumped to her feet and blew him a kiss as she disappeared round the door.

CHAPTER XIX

THE weeks which followed Adrian's interview with Lord Bridley were crammed with events. Adrian had not realized that it was possible to have so much excitement in such a short space of time. The "fixing-up" of the arrangements which were to instal him in the editorial chair of *The Monocle* kept him on tenterhooks of expectation. There were days when an unforeseen hitch threatened to wreck the entire scheme. Lord Bridley had his cantankerous moments. There were moments "when you could do anything with him"—others when you could do nothing. Wilkinson, the astute, hard-headed manager of several of the old man's papers, felt it his duty to his employer to point out the utterly uncommercial character of *The Monocle*: the fact that it could never pay, that it would be a constant drain. He questioned Adrian's ability to fill the post to which he aspired, pointed out practical difficulties, and seemed to take a perverse delight in being obstructive. And yet he was so patently a kind, reliable, and perhaps generous fellow! Adrian used to come back from inter-

views with him with his heart in his boots, and feeling—as he expressed it—“God’s own worm.” There was always the dreadful possibility that Wilkinson was right !

Adrian, however, with boyish confidence, set himself to answer all Mr. Wilkinson’s objections. He spent a fortnight as an additional sub-editor of the *Saturday Messenger* to learn something of the inside of a newspaper office. He busied himself in efforts to be businesslike. He purchased a file, bullied himself into keeping copies of his letters, and even learnt how to use a typewriter. The Squash looked on admiringly, and Queen Elizabeth’s encouragement would almost, had it been necessary, have driven him towards the mysteries of shorthand. Eventually the optimism of youth triumphed over all difficulties; Lord Bridley, invited Mainwaring, Maurice Greene, and himself to dinner at Dieu-donné’s, and the proprietorship of *The Monocle* changed hands. Adrian found himself a London editor, with a year’s contract in his pocket, and about as much knowledge of running a review as a dog has of playing the piano. In fact, his kind heart, generous instincts, and amiable gullibility, combined with his lofty and unprofitable views on the subject of the arts made *The Monocle’s* record of commercial failure safer in his hands than it had ever been before.

During these great days it was always to Queen

Elizabeth that Adrian looked for inspiration, and he took less and less interest in his meetings with Rose, with whom it had never occurred to him to discuss his affairs. As he was sorry for her, however, he could not bring himself to hurt her feelings, and there was something which to his vanity was not unpleasant in possessing an intimacy which he did not return. Rose told him what appeared to him to be all the details of her life, of her desires and hopes, and sometimes it seemed that she was almost telling him of her love for himself. But to this and to her physical attractions the image of Elizabeth made him impervious. It was not Rose's fault that she had no chance against the rival she had never seen. How she dreamed about that girl, to whom she had never been introduced, and ground her teeth ! How she hated the Squash, and every one in it ! But she would be even with them yet. Adrian, however, saw none of this. He realized merely that she was very unhappy at home, and that he was one of her few friends, and could not, therefore, drop her. But all his inner thoughts were centred on Elizabeth. She gripped him, body and soul, until he felt half-ashamed of himself for not being able to live up to the code of the Squash. He was not equal to that splendid comradeship which painters seem sometimes to be able to achieve. What an enigma she was ! But for her full lips and a certain

ripeness of bosom which seemed to belie it, she might have been thought without passion, so innocent of sex-consciousness did she appear. When Adrian retired to bed once with a swollen face, caused by an aching tooth, she came into his room and sat on his bed to say good-night and smoke a cigarette. She bent down and kissed him on his swollen cheek, a little bird-like embrace, as though a beloved "bullie" had hopped on to his shoulder.

Her confidence in the men she lived with made them sure of themselves, and proud of this security. With their freedom of speech they cherished a reticence of deed, and philosophers might have arrived at much the same manner of life after years of study and experiment in squeezing the orange of pleasure to its last drop. There were no *longueurs* in these relationships. Their lives were always kept up to concert pitch; they lived intensely; they had the joys of hopeful travelling without the disillusion of arrival.

Adrian, however, could not but feel himself very different—as indeed he was—from Maurice, Hugh, and Guy, in temperament and point of view. All the others had in them something of Queen Elizabeth's childlike, frolicsome disposition. Adrian had none of it, and by their side he always felt grown-up. Although the son of a painter, he himself had none of the painter's characteristics. To whatever heights he reached,

he reached them by direct thought and intensity of feeling; he could not scale heaven with a line, nor fly there on a splash of colour. So there was a difference in Elizabeth's point of view, which, added to her considerable mental gifts, made her companionship enchanting. To Adrian, her complete lack of prejudice made his own hard-won freedom of thought, of which he was inclined to be proud, look very feeble. In comparison with her clearness of vision and originality of thought, he seemed to be, sometimes, positively manacled with accepted, untested hereditary opinions.

And a certain "earnestness," of which he was not entirely cured before he joined the Squash, got torn to ribbons in contact with her humour. If he attempted to be sublime, he said to himself, he could only do so with pomposity, and, as it were, the turning up of eyeballs. Some of the remarks Elizabeth made seemed to him the sublimest things he had ever heard, but they were said as little sly jokes, which brought them into the heart of tears.

Elizabeth did not allow herself to be monopolized, but she grew insensibly to be more Adrian's friend than any one else's. Perhaps it was, to begin with, a feeling that he was rather different from the rest of them, and might feel out of it, that prompted her to be kind to him, but after a time natural inclination completed what her good

heart had begun. They became increasingly intimate. To Adrian it was an absorbing intimacy, to which everything else in life had to play second fiddle, even *The Monocle*. He had never known any one with so much sensibility, with such a gift for seeing the exact shade of one's meaning before it had been stutteringly expressed, for making comments which opened up new points of view. They came to be accepted as inseparable, nobody thinking for an instant that their friendship was anything more than it appeared to be. Queen Elizabeth was a person whom instinctively one never doubted. The Squash knew so well her way of doing things!

In the long, warm summer evenings she and Adrian would go for expeditions, starting on the tops of buses, and exploring strange suburbs. During the exciting months following the taking over of *The Monocle* by Lord Bridley—which took place just before the publication of the September number in 1913—Elizabeth and Adrian saw still more of one another. They worked together during the day, and nearly always went out together at night, to a play or music-hall. But though he saw so much of her, to Adrian Elizabeth was still baffling, elusive. He did not dare to risk the friendship she gave him, and which he so highly valued, by striving to change it into love.

At last, however, when *The Monocle* had

been in existence about nine months, there came his opportunity.

One evening at the beginning of May, they went to the Opera together, when Charpentier's "Louise" was given. They were neither of them particularly musical in the strict sense of the word, though music acted more powerfully on their emotions than on those of many people whose taste was more finely developed. They had no criticisms for "Louise"; the music bewitched them, the story enthralled, and Paris to them was not the city captured by the Americans known to travelled people, but the dream-city of romance, invented by Henry Murger, and half a hundred successors, French and English. Elizabeth sat with her head back, her eyes large, bright, and dilated, with breathless vitality, more than ever like the women in some of Gainsborough's portraits—and Adrian's eyes reflected her delight. The duet between Louise and her lover seemed to them a thing of almost unearthly beauty; it had a charm for them which was not musical merely, but literary and pictorial. And when the rich voice of the Father sang "*Maintenant, je ne suis plus jeune, et les journées sont longues,*" all the pathos of humble life was borne in upon minds rendered acutely sensitive. Later, as the sound of "*Depuis le jour,*" exquisitely rendered, poured and thrilled into the theatre, the singers played upon them as upon delicate instruments. Each

fine thing that was finely done struck a chord in their hearts, vibrated through them, stirred the imagination to bursting point, to plenitude of developing, unfolding vision. They were like children at their first pantomime, like young things emerging from the Gare du Nord in Paris, at six o'clock of a June morning—absorbed, rapturous. Such enthusiasm would doubtless be absurd to the musical amateur, conscious of the actual ugliness of much of the score: they, however, had brought to the theatre the eyes of children, and that sort of imagination which insists on making a fairy story out of everything.

As they drove back through the starry night, life, to Adrian, did not seem to have anything more to offer.

“I haven't ever been so happy, my dear,” he said, looking at his companion. “I'm sure it won't last.”

Elizabeth looked at him almost shyly.

“You're a gloomy boy, Adrian, when you get half a chance. Luckily, you've got me to keep you in order, otherwise you'd be locking yourself up in a convent, or doing what Maurice tries to do with much more effect.”

“Drinking oneself to death in a convent would be rather a unique experience,” said Adrian. “I shall recommend it to any one I meet who is tired of life, and wants a new sensation. But fancy thinking I'm gloomy, now! I only meant

that when one is fearfully happy, it does bring a little sadness with it, sometimes. 'Tout s'en va comme la fumée,' and so on!"

"Of course, so do we. Don't be so self-important. We're only flies on a window-pane, after all."

"Queen, it's only that I don't want to be a lonely fly on a pane all by myself. Oh, my dear, I love you so fearfully—it is not friendship, or brother and sister, or anything like that. It's you I want, body and soul. I want your blue eyes, and your little white feet, and your bright hair."

"Oh, Adrian, don't!" said Elizabeth. "I'm not going to talk rot, like the hoary young person who never existed, and say, 'Why can't we go on for ever as we are?' I know, if you care for me properly (it's rather nice, Honey, to think you really do!) that you couldn't go on always like this. But don't you be too sorry for yourself; it's harder still for women, whose aching instinct is always to give, to give. My dear, I've got passions just as you have—and Adrian, I'd just love a baby . . . but I'm an awful funk. . . ."

He looked into her eyes, when a street lamp happened for a moment to illuminate them, but they were deep, veiled, and mysterious.

She laughed at his passionate solemnity. "Why, Adrian, I believe you think you are taking

the service again. ‘And now, dear brethren, one word more!’”

“I don’t believe you love me at all,” grumbled Corbet, laughed out of his seriousness. “It’s only just the friendship I have to share with your cats and dogs.”

“And geese,” mocked Elizabeth, adding more seriously: “Don’t be a silly boy, or I shall have to kiss you before the policeman, and in the middle of Tottenham Court Road, too! What would our parents say?”

More than this she would not allow him, and he would not risk straining a friendship which he valued so dearly. They talked on easily and intimately on lighter subjects: on the inevitable *Monocle*, whether Mainwaring was likely to come to tea on Sunday, and, oddly enough, of Rose Harford. Elizabeth, who had heard from Adrian nearly all the incidents of his life, including, of course, his preparation for the priesthood—good heavens, what ages ago *that* seemed!—had never managed to scrape together any interest in Rose. She did not care for the dissenting mind which Rose seemed to possess, and could not understand how the latter could have brought up her mother so badly.

“You know, Adrian, to me that household always gives an impression of mental and moral stuffiness, and decomposition—as though they never opened the windows, and had no decent

drains. What an odious storm in a teacup the 'Jude' incident sounds! You know, I think both the girl and her mother must have had rather nasty minds. . . . You must bring Rose to the Squash one day," she added—rather because she was sorry to have been outspoken about one of Adrian's friends than because she really wanted to see the girl.

Adrian slipped his arm round his companion's waist, as a sign that he did not want to talk any more about Rose, and they sat back in the taxi in a thrilled silence, their hearts suddenly too full for speech. They were turning off into Charlotte Street now, and the sky above them could be seen through the open windows, ablaze with stars, while the full moon made a pathway of silver down the usually squalid road, that was now transfigured out of recognition. The air was full of the dim, faint thunder, the hushed expectancy, the distinct, definable pulsation, the excitement of a London night in summer. Their hands sought each other's instinctively; and then, without warning, there came the moment! It was a moment that Adrian was never to forget; it was a moment in which it seemed for an instant that all he felt, all the passion made pure by its intensity which welled up in his heart, was answered in Elizabeth's eyes. Suddenly his lips found her lips—they had never kissed like this before. He could feel the warmth of her mouth on his, and her

breast rising and trembling against his; and oh, the smallness of her! She was encircled by his arms, and she was not only a swallow and a fairy, she was a woman as well with the long, slender limbs, and the white feet of the nymph in the brake. He could feel her melting in the abandonment of passion as he held her to him, and his lips clung to her, and in those long sweet seconds he seemed to see in her eyes, and feel in the thrilling of her body, his love requited to a degree almost unnerving in its completeness.

The moment passed without speech, and soon the cab reached the Square, turned round into Northampton Street, and stopped with a jerk and groan before their doorway. But it left them each wondering, each a little afraid and tremulously happy, happy with the happiness which is apt to open the way for suffering the most acute that human nature is ever called upon to endure. The face of the "devil" over the doorway, lit up by the street lamp, seemed to Adrian, as he fitted the latch-key into the lock, to be half-convulsed with sarcastic, sneering laughter. He could have struck it with his fist.

CHAPTER XX

ALTHOUGH hostilities were suspended between Mrs. Harford and her daughter, largely owing to Rose's skilful diplomacy, the atmosphere at " St. Chad's " was indubitably becoming more and more electric. As Rose's discontent grew more exasperated her bitterness against her mother increased and grew harder to dissimulate. She certainly had reason to be discontented. With Adrian's departure she lost almost the only friend of her own age that she possessed. To fill the gap she became more and more intimate with the learned Miss Walker, the Suffragist. Mrs. Harford had come to view this friendship with mixed feelings. She was unable, however, to invent an adequate reason for putting a stop to it, since, tiresomely enough, she had herself introduced Miss Walker to the family circle.

Rose was usually at pains to be polite at meals, with a vindictive, highly charged politeness, intensely wearing to the nerves. But occasionally, at a moment's notice, on some slight or fancied provocation, out would come a flow of stored reproach, in which conjecture would boldly assume the form

of statement, almost on oath. In these circumstances, it was perhaps not surprising that Rose grew preternaturally secretive and dissembling, and that, thrown in upon herself, as it were, she grew morbidly self-conscious. She went for long, lonely walks, thinking of the adventure upon which, had it presented itself, she would only too gladly have embarked, or the way in which her Prince Charming would take her in his arms and insist upon embracing her in spite of her struggles. Having but little to do except the Church work with which, as she woke up mentally, she was rapidly becoming bored, she grew more and more unwholesomely meditative. This unhealthy state was often combined with a morbid religious fervour. She would enter the church by herself, in the afternoon, and remain on her knees before the effigy of Christ crucified, sometimes for an hour at a time.

The only events which happened to break up the monotony of her life were her meetings with Adrian, now becoming increasingly rare. Her feelings for Adrian changed so often and were so mysterious that she could not have described them accurately to herself had she wished to do so. When he seemed indifferent to her she felt driven to try to pique him into an exasperated wooing. When he showed what seemed like a "coming-on" disposition, it made her rush to an unseemly exaltation. But if she "put on airs," it was

merely the instinct of the hunting animal that has marked its prey. Adrian was her "way out." No other woman could possibly have as much right to him as she, who had discovered him. She was prepared to fight for him tooth and nail, by all the weapons with which Nature had provided her.

The thought that, since that afternoon in the taxi, which she remembered so well, he had not troubled to make an opportunity to kiss her was humiliating and a constant source of discontent. But it only increased her determination, and had a tonic effect. After her meetings with Adrian she was never quite sure whether she loved him ; but, somehow, he always fitted perfectly into her scheme of things.

As the months slipped by she felt his absence from Hampstead more and more acutely. There was now no possibility of meeting him by chance, of something exciting happening. It was not until nearly eighteen months after Adrian's departure that anything of real importance occurred, but towards the end of that period an experience befell her which put the final touch to her determination, and settled, decisively, her plans.

Adrian had not kept his last appointment at the National Gallery : he had rung up about half an hour beforehand to put it off. This had made her acutely anxious for him to ask her again. Indeed, ever since he had first shown signs of

a tendency to slip away from her he had acquired a new, sentimental attractiveness in her eyes. So she set out to look for him. She did not do it consciously; all she explained to herself was that she had never been to Fitzroy Square, and that she wondered what that romantic locality looked like. There was not really much more than one chance in a thousand of meeting him, but she set off to satisfy her curiosity about Fitzroy Square, and the unlikely happened. She saw him!

It was very different from the adventure she had naïvely imagined. She thought of Adrian's pleased smile, his joyous greeting: "Where did you spring from?" She expected they would have a luxurious tea at the most extravagant tea-shop in the neighbourhood, and afterwards he would give her a peep at the studio, and at the wonderful Squash. As she walked down Fitzroy Street, however, there, indubitably, coming in her direction, but on the other side of the way, was her cousin Adrian. But he was entirely engrossed; he did not see her. He saw, in fact, no one but his companion. Rose looked across venomously at the girl by his side, who, naturally enough, was Elizabeth Moore. The dark girl devoured with her eyes her fairer, more sunny-looking rival with the golden-brown hair, the fresh lips and smile, and the elastic step. Elizabeth Moore had an extraordinary quality of *lightness*. She seemed to dance along, hardly touching the ground, to

be serenely happy. The sight of so much joy, in which Adrian was so obviously sharing, filled Rose with bitterness. Her face grew black, and she bit her lip till it bled.

She turned abruptly down Grafton Street, and hurried back into the Tottenham Court Road, anxious to escape from a sight which suited as excellently the summer day as her wrath was out of place in it. She hurried down Gower Street, and as she felt tired, and could think of nowhere else to go, she made for the British Museum, and sat down on one of the seats by the entrance, watching the pigeons. In a little while her anger gave way to self-pity. Was not Adrian the only friend she had, and now did it not look as though she had lost him, or must share him with another, more attractive in his eyes than herself? She was derelicted at Hampstead in a house that she had come to hate, forced into daily subjection to a religion which, if it inspired her to intemperate fervour, chafed her with its cast-iron creed of renunciation and self-mutilation. Oh, was she not sick of it? She stamped her foot, encased for Adrian's benefit in uncomfortable patent leather, so that it gave her a twinge of pain—a little cumulative straw that made her shriek within herself, hysterically, though outwardly she was sufficiently controlled to look merely disagreeable. A small child toddling at her feet looked at her and cried. Feeling that

in another moment she would try to tear the creature's head from its body, and throw it down the stone steps, she got up and moved away.

She went back to her home, and ordered tea for herself in her own room, and took off her frock and the uncomfortable patent shoes. As she looked at herself in the glass she wondered desperately if she had not as much to give as that other girl. Perhaps—and the thought made her tremble all over, and sent a thrill of fire through her veins—perhaps “giving” was the only way: the way to escape from all things middle-aged, to knowledge of good and evil, to life exciting and full. Some strain of the “rip” inflamed the intense nature she had acquired from Presbyterian forbears; and while she examined her reflection, and thought of her rival, her mind became made up. . . .

“Are you going to the solemn Evensong, Rose?” Mrs. Harford's nasal tones penetrated like a cold wind through the door. “I'm just starting.”

“No. I'm hanged if I am,” she said to herself, adding aloud with a diplomacy now characteristic, “No, not to-night, Mother, I've got a headache, and am going to bed.”

She did, indeed, go and lie down on her bed, after taking from the writing-table drawer, which she unlocked with a key from her jewel-case, her latest purchase from an “art” bookseller not

far from the Charing Cross Road. It was only with the aid of such "tabasco" volumes that she was now able to support the dullness of her existence. This existence was indeed become intolerable, and now that she had decided on her plan of campaign, she was bursting to put it into execution. Since she could not get Adrian back to Hampstead, she would have to go to Adrian.

It was not until some months later that the occasion for which she was waiting presented itself.

One of Mrs. Harford's peculiarities was her love of making her daughter do many of the simple, uninteresting duties which servants are paid to perform. One morning when Rose had refused to fetch in the garden-chairs, and brazenly rung to tell the maid to do it, a torrent of invective had been poured forth by her mother, who could contain herself no longer.

"You have lost all your religion, and become worldly and abominably selfish," was Mrs. Harford's mild beginning. "Your face is an open book to me. I notice your daily deterioration. I see Uncle George and Cousin Emma growing every moment more clearly marked in your expression. (Uncle George was the family "rip" whose wife had obtained a divorce from him; and Cousin Emma, after getting "into trouble," and being thrown out of her home, had sunk to no one knew what.) Rose grew pale with fury,

speechless, mad. Her eyes grew large and dark, and she looked magnificent. She pressed the tips of her nails into her hands fiercely, and bit her lips from time to time to quell the torrent of her fury. Very soon the decencies of verbal warfare were forgotten. Mother and daughter vituperated one another in a way that Billingsgate might have been proud to emulate.

"How can you say such things of me, Mother?" cried the girl. "You know they are not true, but you do just the things to make them true, the way you treat me. If her parents treated poor Cousin Emma as you treat me, I don't wonder she went where she did. I shall do the same, I warn you, if you go on telling lies about me."

"Ah! I see it all in your face," said Mrs. Harford triumphantly. "I have known it all along."

Her mysterious knowledge seemed to cause her a sort of graveyard satisfaction, rather than sorrow. "I have known it all along from the very first," she continued. "I always suspected there was something wrong between you and Adrian Corbet; he has had a thoroughly debasing influence on you. Your whole moral sense is warped."

"Mother, how can you say such lies to me?" screamed Rose. "It's a lie, and you know it is. Oh, why should I have to live in this wretched house!"

"You ought to be grateful that I let you,"

said Mrs. Harford. "Many mothers would send you away."

The girl became suddenly silent, and looked out of the window as though making a calculation. Mrs. Harford, deeming the victory won, began to soften.

"Now, Rose," said she, in a matter-of-fact, ultra-sensible tone, "don't be a silly girl. Come here and give me a kiss, and turn over a new leaf. You can be a very good girl indeed when you like."

"I see . . . that's how it is!" said Rose ominously, still looking out of the window. She submitted to the ordeal of being pecked at by her mother, with a preoccupied air, and then immediately going out of the room, she ran upstairs and put on her hat. Afterwards she sallied forth alone on to the Heath. She wanted to think rapidly. Could she act to-morrow? To-morrow she had one of her rare appointments with Adrian. He was going to take her to a big literary reception at a Club in Cork Street, which he thought would amuse her. It was given by Mrs. Ashburton, the novelist. If she did not act to-morrow she might not be able to see him again for weeks! He was the "way out," and he was the man, the keeper of the enchanted garden, the giver of freedom, and joy, and . . . he was Adrian, with the nice wavy hair!

She was very late for dinner, but Mrs. Harford

controlled herself, and was angelic. She had just written a complete record of the scene which had taken place, in her Register of Sins, which she wrote up with scrupulous care every day, and read out at the end of each fortnight to the priest, a curate at a church in Pimlico, to whom she was in the habit of confessing. The record was written with naïve dishonesty, and ran as follows—

“This afternoon, in speaking to Rose for her own good, I did not keep a strict control over my tongue, but allowed myself to grow impatient in my anxiety to make her see the snares into which she was falling.”

Having transcribed this self-glorifying confession, she made the most strenuous efforts to cultivate the sublime virtue of patience. She was very beautifully patient during dinner.

“I heard you going for each other when I came in,” said James gruffly. “Been plaguing your mother, Rose?” he asked.

“No, I haven’t!” said Rose abruptly.

“Rose and I had a little difference of opinion,” said Mrs. Harford in sugared tones, holding up her new virtue like a flower, and sniffing it complacently, “but we’ve made it up again now.”

Rose made no comment, and the conversation passed to the details of James’s business and the clergyman friends he had met by chance during the day.

"I haven't seen Father Oliver for years," Rose heard him droning on, "and he was looking so well. He is just going off to India with fifteen thousand soldiers. He does such a good work, you know. He asked me if I had any old clothes to give away."

"Good heavens!" muttered Rose to herself. "If only I had some new clothes to *wear*!"

After dinner she slipped up again into her room, and fell down on her knees by the crucifix on the wall by her bed.

"Oh, dear Jesus," she cried, "have pity on me. They make it so hard for me to love Thee as I ought and as I want to love Thee!"

Not even her mother's methods of correction and her persistent vulgarization of religious matters had been able to eradicate the beliefs which Rose had learned in the cradle, and which had taken an almost unshakable hold of her whole mind and personality. She longed for a wider, freer, more delicately sinful and worldly life, but she never forgot her devotion to Christ, and if she wished to sin for a year or so, to taste forbidden fruit, she yet looked forward to the luxury of an impassioned repentance. She was convinced, also, that all real ladies would be found in heaven eventually.

On the following morning, as if in cynical contradiction to her mood of the night before, she had a further and more severe difference with

her mother on the subject of Adrian. She had planned the conflict beforehand, and was quite prepared for it. After breakfast, Mrs. Harford took her daughter aside and suggested they should offer special prayers for Adrian Corbet's return to the Church and to a state of grace.

Rose's eyes flashed at once with the light of battle.

"I don't believe he's ever ceased to be in a state of grace," she snapped. "I think it's abominably priggish to think of us praying for him! We're no better than he is!"

"I hoped you had recovered from your mood of yesterday," Mrs. Harford sighed, "but I find I was mistaken. And the signs are there—the signs are there."

"I won't stand it, Mother!" cried Rose, in a fury now. "I won't stand these constant allusions to all the bad lots of the family. If I've always got to suffer for an imaginary likeness to them I'll justify it."

They were sitting in the dining-room. The French window was open on to the garden. High above the may-tree a lark was singing mockingly in the sunlight. The darkness of the room and the brightness outside seemed to Rose symbolical. A passion of revolt surged up in her: the long-expected moment had come at last. Things were happening now with a vengeance!

"What I see in your face is one of the bitterest

sorrows of my life, Rose," went on Mrs. Harford, turning up her eyes to the ceiling.

"Well, you shan't see it any longer!"

With set teeth and clenched fists the girl rushed out of the room. The scene had been unlovely in the extreme. Rose felt it to be highly vulgar, but she didn't care. She would be vulgar for once in a way, and *do* something. What was the good of being genteel and "puffick lady-" like for ever and ever. She would act; she was twenty-five, and nothing would ever happen to her unless she roused herself and did something! With extreme stealth she went up to her room, locked the door, and began making her preparations. Her necessary clothes were already packed in a very light cane hold-all. Her jewels were in a little leather case; the savings of years were deposited in the Post Office Savings Bank, but she had a five-pound note and some loose money for immediate expenses. Then, waiting till her mother had left the house to attend a Thursday morning "meeting," she slipped out without being seen, and took a taxi into freedom.

CHAPTER XXI

AFTER their drive home from "Louise"—an occasion which seemed to be a turning-point in their relationship, Elizabeth let Adrian understand that they were not again, for the present, at least, to disturb emotional depths. As well as they could they regained the old easy note of laughter and comradeship. But to Adrian the whole aspect of the world had changed: the memory of that night seemed to have altered everything. Elizabeth was now more adorable than ever, through having become, in an earthly moment, as human as he was. She must have realized this, and felt virginal tremors, for almost insensibly she put Adrian aside "to cool," saw less of him than usual, and though always light-hearted and daring, was careful never to be intimate. What a difficult mask it was, that expression of smiling candour and impudence!

On the morning of the day, on which Adrian had arranged to take Rose to the Lady Authors' Club in Cork Street, he mentioned the engagement to Elizabeth, and asked her if she thought Mrs.

Ashburton's party would be likely to amuse his cousin.

To Adrian's surprise, Elizabeth, for once, seemed almost disagreeable, and not profoundly interested. It was early in the morning.

"I should think the 'Poultry Farm' would amuse any one," she answered listlessly.

"Anyway," said Adrian, "as she wants to see the authors at feeding-time, her curiosity will be satisfied! We are going to meet at the party."

Mrs. Ashburton was a collector of literary personalities. She kept an eye on young men who might become "some one" later on. She longed to be able to look down from heaven, and see herself in a volume of Memoirs, such as she herself had so often and so industriously compiled. "In Mrs. Ashburton, who gathered round her at her weekly parties a number of the most brilliant men and women of her time, Mr. So-and-So found one of his earliest and most sympathetic friends. Indeed, it was largely owing to Mrs. Ashburton's personal encouragement, and the influential editors to whom she introduced him, that the young poet . . ." and so on. How sweet it would look! It was with a queer mental humility that she thought of her appearance in the Memoirs and Biographies of the future, as she waited for her guests to immortalize her. Adrian she had, in a sense, discovered. Being thrown near

him by chance at one of Mainwaring's parties, she had drawn him out, and promptly "collected" him. The people to whom she had introduced him numbered several for whose work he had a great respect. Individually, he knew how kind and lovable most of them were, but Adrian could never understand how it was that the lions roaring together made such a pathetic and absurd impression.

Rose was a little late, and Adrian was the first to arrive at the "Poultry Farm." Mrs. Ashburton extended to him one of her second-best smiles, and he was provided with a cup of cold tea and a slice of rather heavy cake. He sank into a seat next to the least overpowering person he could see—a little alien journalist, called Fitzpatrick, a chirpy little man with black, rather greasy hair, and rimless eye-glasses—and looked round the room to see who was there.

One of the first acquaintances he noticed was Mr. Reginald Flame, the youthful poet of the moment, leaning against the chimney-piece. His long, dark hair trembled in the soft breeze of a young girl's sighs, and Lady Alethea Dorking yearned towards him, while he explained the mid-Victorian "wordiness" and turgidity of Browning, Swinburne, Tennyson, and the others. "They were really deplorable," he explained.

Lady Alethea drooped her eyes. "If you have an afternoon free this week, Mr. Flame," she

stammered, "I do wish you would come and read me some of your new poems."

Mr. Flame, scenting free food in the offing, graciously consented.

But it was not only incense which ascended to the ceiling in graceful spirals from Mrs. Ashburton's party. The rank smoke of hatred frequently poisoned the aromatic cloud of flattery. As the editor of a "literary" periodical, Adrian soon found himself surrounded by the resentment of all the people whose corns he had unwittingly trodden on, as well as by the pleased purring of those whom he had quite as unwittingly flattered. Adrian wondered who a little man with a solemn, yellow face and wrathful eyes, who was talking scandal about him in a shrill voice, could possibly be, when Mainwaring enlightened him.

"That's Hellis over there—our grandmother's reviewer. You've offended his self-esteem, Corbet, by throwing his rotten verses out of *The Monocle* with a printed slip. He's just like one of those creatures you see on the beach which, when you step on them, squirt a foul liquid at you. Hellis will jab you in the back with his stylographic pen when he gets a chance, you watch!"

Adrian took an immediate fancy to Mr. Hellis, for being so whole-hearted. He loved a real, genuine hater. It was the flatterers and time-servers who made him sick, because they nearly always took him in. He was constitutionally unable

to resist amiability, and before half an hour had gone by an utterly impossible woman had nearly planted on him an utterly hopeless story.

In spite of his own weakness—he was just as bad as all the others really—Adrian had enough detachment to be amused at the scene, while he was waiting for Rose, who was unaccountably late. Success, of however blatant a quality, was so naïvely worshipped ! In one corner of the room he recognized the editor of a second-rate “society journal.” He was surrounded ! Literary ladies could be heard, with the heavy machinery of tact grown rather rusty, remarking on the beauties of the latest dances, and how, by the way, that just reminded them of a little article they had written, which would be just the thing. The Editor’s distress of mind was evident, as the ruthless of both sexes fell upon him in his moment of relaxation, in the hope of snaring some of his employer’s guineas.

In another corner Adrian was relieved to see two old Socialists, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, who nodded and smiled at him genially. Mr. and Mrs. Henderson were the oddest couple ! Undistinguished in literature—she wrote on Chinese art, and he on Sociology—they had, nevertheless, plodded on so industriously for so many years, knew the “ropes” so well, had befriended so many people in times of adversity, and published so many indifferent books, that they

had achieved a certain fame. In appearance and costume they affected the unconventional. Mrs. Henderson was draped in an art fabric of old mauve, and her kind, smiling face was surmounted by a richly floral hat. John Henderson had the appearance of a Socialist of the old school, when bombs were fresh, and "revolutions of fire and slaughter" were on the programme, and discussed by stealth in deadly earnest. He was a survival. His shaggy eyebrows, waving black hair, sombrero, and secret hand-shake were out of place and a little ridiculous in our weaker but more intelligent century. Nowadays, as he would say, the habit of seeing both sides of a question is making such disastrous headway that people will soon feel intensely about nothing. Too much intelligence, perhaps, always undermines conviction. If there was one thing old John Henderson could not tolerate, it was the modern young person, who, "without being exactly a Socialist, thinks there is a lot in it." They had both, like many "advanced" people, of blameless private lives, a great admiration for "illicit love." If a girl of their acquaintance had the enterprise to become the mother of a child born out of wedlock, she at once became the object of their passionate enthusiasm, and they spoke of her as the great World-Force, the noble Mother-Woman, and other things with capital letters. They hadn't any children of their own, poor dears. They were

simple-hearted underneath, but, being "literary," they had to have their capital letters. The keynote of the character of this distinct couple was their unselfishness. Mrs. Henderson could not, try, how she would, cure herself of a maternal "interest" in young men and their works. She had a youthful aspirant by her side now, and Adrian could hear her mothering him in a way which made his heart ache. The young man had written a very bad book, and Mrs. Henderson was trying to tell him so in a way which would encourage him to write a better. In a room containing many humbugs it was a delight to see such courageous, generous souls.

There was such a babel of conversation and rattle of teacups that Adrian did not hear the door open, and Rose had entered the room before he looked up. Mrs. Ashburton greeted her warmly, oblivious of whom she might be, but feeling instinctively that such eyes and lips would appear in "Memoirs" without doubt, if their owner remained long enough in literary circles. Rose was looking a little pale, Adrian thought, as he took her to sit by the window, after introducing her to Mr. and Mrs. Henderson, to Mainwaring, and one or two more of his acquaintances. Her faintly darkened upper lip trembled a little, and her hazel eyes looked almost haggard, as she sat down by his side. She was plainly dressed in a black coat and skirt and a rather smart

black hat. Some inherited instinct must also have told her how keenly a man will notice a woman's feet, for hers were *soignés* to an unusual degree.

"Adrian, I've done it!" she said in tragic tones, as soon as they could talk quietly.

"Done what?" he asked, amused.

"Left home, had a row with mother, and I'm not going back."

"Not going back?" he echoed, with misgiving.

"Then where *are* you going?"

"I don't know. I've got five pounds, and some money in the Savings Bank—about another twenty pounds. I shall take rooms somewhere until I find some work to do."

They looked at one another blankly. Adrian was perplexed, and rather alarmed. He had flirted with Rose in the dim past, certainly, but he had never for an instant, even before the reign of Good Queen Bess, imagined himself to be in love with her. The idea of having her on his hands was exasperating. She was, besides, undeniably attractive, and to-day she had lifted the standard against her home, and in doing so, had opened the door for a lover. She did not say so, and Adrian did not translate his instincts, but they both knew.

"You can't take lodgings," he said, his voice agitated, and rather husky. "A girl—by herself—can't. You ought to belong to some residential club, or go to some friends."

"I have no friends," said Rose simply. She could not resist making the obvious effect, though her eyes were bright with genuine tears. Her future—so full of possibilities—she could not regard with equanimity: it frightened her, as well it might, and the emotional crisis of the morning was having its aftermath.

"I don't expect I count for very much, Rose," he said humbly, cursing himself for the feeble sentimentality on which any one who knew him could rely, "but you must let me do what I can."

"Oh, Adrian," she whispered, turning on him her bright hazel eyes, so full of sensual appeal. "Don't talk like that. You know . . ."

Her glance told him the rest, and left him troubled and excited.

"Let's get out of this, and go for a walk," he said. But it was not easy to escape just then, for Madame France-Calverley, a woman with an immense bosom, and a bold, roving, dark eye, had advanced in a determined way to the piano.

"Oh, well, if you would really like it, Mrs. Ashburton," she remarked in reverberating American, "I'll give you that little song right now."

She gave it them right then—in her clear, bell-like soprano—a surprisingly small voice for so large a woman, but marvellously manipulated, her intonation and expression being alike of unusual

charm. It was a setting of the song in Gautier's
"Fortunio"—

Les papillons, couleur de neige
Volent par essaims sur la mer
Beaux papillons blancs, quand pourrai-je
Prendre le bleu chemin de l'air.

Savez-vous, O belle des belles !
Ma bayardère aux yeux de jais,
S'ils me voulaient prêter leurs ailes,
Dites, savez-vous où j'irais ?

Sans prendre un seul baiser aux roses,
A travers vallons et forêts,
J'irais à vos lèvres mi-closes
Fleur de mon âme, et j'y mourrais.

It was already late in the afternoon when Adrian and Rose eventually escaped, and, leaving the distinguished authors chattering together, walked into Piccadilly, then into the Green Park, through the gate by the Ritz, and on towards Westminster.

"Let us go as far as Westminster Bridge," said Adrian, "and have a look at the view. The view from there is one of the most wonderful in all London, even if it is a bit hackneyed. Do you know, though I live in London, and it is more familiar to me than any other town in the world, I can never get over my excitement about it ! To look across the Green Park at night, from the top of an omnibus, is one of the most thrilling experiences that can happen to me. The bright lights of the Mall, and the Palace, and round

“ Brock’s Benefit ” glitter like an enchantment across the blackness of the Park—and I am sure the stars shine brighter there than anywhere else in the sky. And in the twilight, or late afternoon, the view from Waterloo or Westminster Bridge looking towards St. Paul’s is only surpassed by that loveliest view of all—the view from Battersea Bridge, looking towards the Power Station.”

“ Adrian ! ” said Rose, with amusement, “ fancy comparing St. Paul’s Cathedral with a group of chimneys ! ”

They walked on till they came to the middle of Westminster Bridge, and then stopped and leaned over the parapet. Just in front of them, a flotilla of newly painted steamers made a pleasant splash of colour in the deepening grey. They watched with interest the movements of the men working on the various craft. A tall man stood, darkly outlined, on the stern of a cavernous barge, which was slipping down with the stream. He leaned with all his weight against the oar, which he used as rudder and propeller. Two men got out of a little dinghy which had put off from the Surrey shore while they watched, and climbed on to the nearest of the penny steamers. The foremost man had a red beard, and wore a peaked cap, the other wore the blue dungarees of an engineer. They both disappeared down the companion-way of the further steamer, which was called the *Albert Edward*. Perched high over the water as they

were, they looked down on the silent pre-occupied life of the river, taking in each detail of the men's movements without being seen by them.

"I feel like a departed spirit up here," said Adrian, laughing, "watching those fellows playing about below."

"Oh, but look at St. Paul's, and the sun on the clouds," said Rose rapturously.

The great dome, surmounted by its glittering cross, rose mysterious in the pearl-grey evening light, from among the dusty warehouses and wharf buildings at its feet, like a fantastic bubble. In front of them in the sky were bold, rolling, riotous masses of cloud, touched to a brilliant pink by the reflection of the setting sun. All round them was greyness—sky, river, and houses—a pearl-coloured expanse, which made an exquisite background for the clouds. The softened murmurs of the town intensified the deep calm of the evening, which, with the flashing out of the lights of the Hotel Cecil and the Savoy, began to prepare for the coming of night.

"Isn't it lovely?" said the girl, looking up at her companion. "Whatever happens, I could never go back home again. I should die. I can't breathe there: they stifle me."

"But you'll never be able to find rooms—a girl can't possibly live alone in rooms in London, even in these days."

“Isn't it stupid?” said Rose, stamping a little foot. “As though girls weren't quite as capable of looking after themselves as men. If boys can't stand their homes, they can go off, and every one says, ‘How enterprising and spirited!’ If a girl does the same, they cry, ‘How improper!’ But, Adrian, I must stay somewhere. I can't spend the night on the Embankment. I shall have to stay at an hotel if I can't find rooms. And that will cost such an awful lot of money.”

She was so designedly helpless, that he grew desperate. It was almost that she seemed to urge him to take her somewhere for the night, as though she were surrendering herself entirely to advances which he was not conscious ever to have made.

“I must think what's to be done, Rose,” he said. “Now, at any rate, we must go and dine.”

They left the Bridge, and Adrian turned his steps instinctively towards the little French restaurant, near Golden Square, which was the Squash's headquarters in Central London. When they arrived, Madame Rousseau (or “The Duck,” as she was called by the Squash) fluttered across and greeted them. The room was empty, but apparently the “Monsieur-qui-parle-très-bien-le français” had been in to say that he would be dining there at half-past eight with Mademoiselle Elise.

Elizabeth and Maurice—for he was the one with the gift of tongues—came in while they spoke. They greeted one another with pleasure, and Adrian introduced them to his guest. Afterwards they sat down to dinner—omelettes and filet de bœuf, with a bottle of good claret—at their usual table.

“Adrian often speaks of you,” said Elizabeth, smiling at Rose, and quite unconscious that she was making that composed-looking maiden boil with wrath and “designs.” “I’ve often asked him why he didn’t ask you to come and see us. I hope you *will* come one of these days.”

“Thanks, awfully,” said Rose, “I should like to, especially from now onwards !”

“Rose has joined the ranks of the free and unrespectable,” Adrian remarked. “She has had a row with her home people, who are very narrow and crushing, and run away for good.”

Elizabeth opened her eyes wide.

“Oh, la la !” she said. “That’s rather risky if you hadn’t time to pack. It’s fearful to begin without pyjamas or a tooth-brush. Makes one feel like Eve cast out of the garden, but even she had a nice apron of leaves.”

“I couldn’t wait,” said Rose, “I just had to come, and besides—I slammed the door.”

“Of course, you couldn’t go back after that,” laughed Queen Elizabeth, “any more than Becky could have returned to fetch her pocket-handker-

chief after chucking back the dictionary to Miss Jemima."

"One is able to make so few effects in this world," said Maurice, rather pompously, "that it would be iniquitous to spoil any of them."

"So, here she is," observed Adrian, looking instinctively at Elizabeth as being the one person in the world most likely to provide a satisfactory solution to the difficulty. The two girls eyed each other for a minute: Elizabeth kindly, but rather timidly, for she instinctively distrusted the luxuriousness of Rose's physical attributes; Rose with carefully dissimulated dislike. Maurice was already turning on the strange girl the *regards déshabilleurs* which, for all her prudery, Rose somehow invited. Adrian looked at Elizabeth, waiting for her to speak, with the eye of one who loves with heart and soul. At their back stood Madame Rousseau, watching the little group out of her bright, dark eyes, her fat arms folded over her capacious bosom.

"What she must do," said Elizabeth, smiling, after a little pause, "is quite evident. She must come and join the Squash. We've got another room. There's one on our landing, Adrian."

There was a tiny pause, during which the proverbial pin might have been heard dropping, but Rose lost no time in clinching the matter. The hearts of both Elizabeth and Adrian sank as they heard her exclamation, "Oh, how kind

you are ! I really don't know what on earth I should have done." The clear, rather hard, hazel eyes filled with tears, and both Corbet and the Queen had to admit themselves nonplussed. " It is extraordinary," Adrian reflected, " how powerful a weapon is ' the laws of polite society ' in the hands of a determined woman ! "

CHAPTER XXII

IT is perhaps only natural that the new-comer should always be suspect. Reversing the principle of British law, he is guilty until he has shown himself to be innocent. You may see the instinct at work in any railway-carriage or public conveyance. Travellers who get in during the course of a journey are eyed with barely concealed dislike, until they have gone through a probationary period of good behaviour. The freshman at a Public School or at the Universities does not achieve popularity or even tolerance until he has shown himself to be a congenial spirit. It was hardly to be wondered at that the Squash's attitude towards Rose was at first one of reserve.

Adrian had settled down there quickly enough and made friends, for, although he did not entirely catch the queer spirit of the house, it was certainly a spirit that was sympathetic to him. Maurice and Elizabeth were both his intimates, but Hugh and Dilly he never quite got to know. With Rose, however, a more disturbing element entered. Oddly enough, the Squash now, for the first time in its history, became self-conscious.

“Something is going to happen with that girl there,” said Guy to himself as he crossed the road after making her acquaintance at tea the day after her arrival. He was troubled for his friends. He felt immeasurably older, too, than they, more steeled and seasoned, less likely to be carried off his feet than Adrian or Maurice or even old Hugh.

This apprehension was in some degree felt by the Squash itself, especially by the two girls. By a sort of tacit conspiracy a rule of life had been arrived at between them which, though calling into play all the self-control of the men they lived with and consequently galling them considerably, yet kept the household sweet and clean and gave it permanence. Having for official purposes no morals and no prejudices, they had no appearances to keep up, no elaborate comedy to play. They never pretended to be less human than other women, but their frank, joyous association with the men in the studio was precious to them, and they had enough knowledge of the world and of life to know that the lowering of their standards would at once break up their happy comradeship. They would become jealous units; hatred and sorrow would be born, even their own revolutionary little world would despise them, and their self-confidence in dealing with the greater world they had renounced would be undermined.

These considerations, combined with breadth of view and a natural candour of mind, strengthened

them in their instinct to avoid danger. And the custom of "playing the game," as they called it, once established, no one for fear of being a traitor to the others would venture to destroy the harmony of the house by breaking it. The men, reversing the usual process, took their cue from the girls, and as far as their common roof was concerned, it was a point of honour with them to keep their lives immaculate.

So to all the inhabitants of the Squash the coming of Rose caused grave doubts. She was an unusually pretty girl, and Maurice and Hugh, and even Guy, admired her immensely. But the women, naturally severe on their own sex, wondered if she would play fair or prove a 'blackleg' and lead their brothers astray.

Having put her foot in it by her impulsive invitation, which she considered Rose a beast to have accepted quite *au pied de la lettre*, Elizabeth characteristically saw the thing through. She took charge of Rose after dinner, drove with her to the cloakroom where she had left her scanty luggage and then back to the Devil's House, where she introduced her to Dilly and to Madame Mirbeau, saw about her room, and provided her with everything that she lacked. She also induced Rose to pursue the statesmanlike course of writing to her mother, giving her address, and saying she had taken rooms in a house with some girl friends and asking for her luggage to be sent on to her.

On the following day a certain amount of luggage arrived, together with a note for Rose from Mrs. Harford, in which the latter remarked that she was no daughter of hers and that she would have only herself to blame for any misfortunes that might befall her. Subsequently Miss Walker came and sniffed suspiciously, jumped to the worst conclusions, and was put to flight. The Squash laughed at Rose's handling of Miss Walker, but they did not altogether relish being sniffed at.

Rose smiled enigmatically as she dropped her mother's letter into the wastepaper-basket. She felt all the impatience of an energetic personality which has been condemned for a long time to a forced inaction. Now that she was free she was quite determined to have a run for her money.

It was extraordinary to notice the disadvantage at which she had the other members of the house. By a little manœuvring and using their very virtues against them she had them completely at her mercy. Nothing could have been more "sweet" than her behaviour to Hilda Carter and to Elizabeth and to the men. She never, at first at all events, gave them a chance to find fault. Butter would not melt in her mouth. Her demureness, however, was rather galling. She blushed and hung her head when any one uttered a naughty word, and went obstinately to church on Sundays, so that she became a sort of enigma and was considered "awfully good" and accepted at her own valua-

tion. But her prudishness and capacity for being shocked were in themselves cause of provocation, and introduced a flirtatious atmosphere into the house which in the old days had been unheard of. It was fascinating—both Maurice and fat Hugh found it so—to make advances to this diffident girl, who invited them by her very bashfulness and suggestion of “the young person.” They would wait for her and manage to meet her accidentally in the hall when she was going out, and linger talking to her on the stairs on their way to bed.

To Adrian's secret displeasure, instead of finding himself thrown entirely on Elizabeth's society, he noticed that she seemed to avoid him, to go out of her way to be with Maurice. She was constantly in Maurice's room, helping him with his work and correcting his proofs, and often she had sadder and more difficult tasks to do for him. For Maurice had been unable to overcome the effects of an unexpected success and an unwonted supply of well-paid commissions. *The Monocle*, by printing his best work, had brought his name into prominence. He suddenly became the fashion, with the illogical result that the Byronic pose of a few months before became an ineradicable habit. He drank. He was thrown out of neighbouring saloon-bars with tiresome regularity, and often he was not sufficiently presentable to be allowed to show up at the offices of the publishers or editors who had his future in their hands. As soon as the

frequency of his unsteady homecomings made it clear that the trouble had got beyond his volition, Elizabeth took him in hand. It was a time which very nearly coincided with the arrival of Rose at the Devil's House. Elizabeth's absorption in Maurice acted on Corbet as an irritant. He was jealous : it was no use trying to conceal it. He was horribly jealous of Maurice, who in such a mean way had appealed to Queen Elizabeth on her weakest side. Her pity was stronger than her love ; but surely he was as much to be pitied as Maurice, who was only suffering from the results of his own folly and weakness. The harder he tried to drown these thoughts (of which he was naturally ashamed) the more irritated he became. He was constantly making efforts to arrive at an " understanding " with Elizabeth, and she, in her sunny way, as constantly eluded him. He was always trying to bring about, by artificial means, by contrived meetings and transparent ruses for being alone with her, one of those candid talks when man and woman speak their whole hearts to one another, which occur so seldom in a lifetime and are never brought about by a lover's plans. To Elizabeth, accustomed constantly to use her intuition, to divine things, notice them and feel them, without having recourse to the i-dotting and t-crossing of speech, her lover's obtuseness seemed almost an affront. Why could he not realize that she would not have given him what she had, if

she had not loved him with her whole heart? The fineness of her nature was hurt by his inability to grasp what had happened. If his love was not strong enough and his faith in her unequal to the task of refraining from being jealous—if he put no trust in her steadfastness, it looked almost as if they were not genuine, not “the real thing.” So, deciding that Adrian ought to trust her, she continued to devote a large share of her time to Maurice, who sorely needed her ministrations. Adrian’s passion blinded him and his annoyance increased. Meanwhile, either for consolation or to show off, or in the mood of a spoiled and rather odious child, or because constant companionship was a necessity of his nature, he began to take more notice of Rose. Here, however, he found new troubles. Rose was warmly affectionate and responsive, but, watching him out of the corner of her eye, nearly always contrived to be going out with either Guy or Hugh, while in the house Maurice, when he was not either drunk or in Elizabeth’s firm keeping, was constantly to be found at her side. This well-manipulated competition had the effect calculated for it on Adrian. His sense of proprietorship was up in arms: he began to underline the length of their friendship and the degree of their intimacy. Rose’s way of holding him at arm’s length, while being on occasions almost unduly affectionate, lent her a provocativeness which, while she was living with her

mother at Hampstead, she had never possessed. And how different the demure Rose of his early recollections had in a moment become ! Who could have foretold in the rather negligible young person of three months ago the assured, attractive young woman of to-day who was skilfully managing four men at once ? The difference in the Squash that Rose's presence was gradually making was not lost either on Dilly or on Elizabeth.

“ Look here, Elizabeth,” the former remarked one day when her endurance had been tried to bursting-point by some defection on the part of Hugh Winterton, who was more or less considered her particular property, “ I don't want to be a cat, but since you brought that girl into the place the Squash has never been the same. I'm not complaining about Adrian ; he is a good sort and your friend. But this girl is different. Why should we have her sour-faced old mother sending her Miss Walkers here to spy on us, to try to find out what sort of morals we've got, and then reporting the place to be a sort of disorderly house ? It's simply wretched. We want to go our own way ; we don't want to be bored with the abuse of old tabbies who don't know anything about anything. Why should we have to be subjected to the criticism of odious outsiders, all for the sake of a girl whom—we may as well be frank about it—we both loathe ? ”

“ I asked her on the spur of the moment, you know, Dilly,” Queen Elizabeth replied. “ I’m inclined to think by the way she clinched the matter at once that she had been fishing for an invitation. But now she’s here we can’t very well ask her to go.”

“ If the Squash breaks up, Moore,” Dilly dryly remarked, “ I’m inclined to think that you will have to bear the blame.”

This little encounter between Elizabeth and Dilly was more important to both of them than the occurrence would seem to warrant, from the fact that during the years they had lived under the same roof they had never once fallen out and hardly exchanged a *serious* word, much less an angry one.

It was half-way through June when an event occurred which put the final touch to Dilly’s irritation and to some extent brought matters to a head. It was the occasion of the annual Charity Ball which Mrs. Ashburton got up at the Dover Galleries and to which the Squash made a point of going every year. Fat Hugh Winterton went, as usual, as a Folly ; Rose was a radiantly attractive Columbine ; Maurice Greene, appropriately enough, was garbed as a Bacchanal, in the costume made familiar by the Russian dancers. Elizabeth was more beautiful, thought Adrian, than he had ever seen her before, in the ragged frock of Cinderella. Adrian himself went as a duellist, in a costume that was both cool and becoming.

The dance was definitely “ artistic ” and literary, and there were a great number of distinguished people in the room. These celebrities, however, did not do much to add to the beauty of the scene, and (as Hugh Winterton remarked to Rose) the dance would have been as frumpy as a parish meeting but for the “ young and beautiful unknowns ” of both sexes. Adrian danced as much as he could with Elizabeth, but after the fifth waltz she grew nervous about Maurice, who had already begun to visit the buffet in search of brandies-and-sodas, and went to look after him. Adrian looked round to try to discover Rose, but did not see her. At last, however, he noticed her disappearing with Hugh Winterton through the doorway into Grafton Street. He danced the rest of the evening with different girls of his acquaintance, with Rose, and several times more with Elizabeth. It was not until after supper that he managed to get a dance with Dilly. He noticed that she was distraite and moody, but he did not connect it in any way with his vision of Hugh and Rose. After the waltz Dilly said she was tired, and sick of dancing and wanted to go home. Adrian remonstrated, but as she was firm he got her a cab and put her in it. She would not accept his offer to drive her back. She was certainly not going to take any one into her confidence about what had upset her, and she nursed her sorrow by herself. What had happened had indeed been a

small thing, but it had sufficed to blow the fire of her annoyance into flame. She had gone out in the street after dancing with Mainwaring, and the two of them had walked innocently enough round the corner into New Bond Street. There at their feet drew up a taxi. Its two occupants could be seen apparently embracing, and out into the road stepped Hugh and Rose ! Dilly hurried Mainwaring on (he had not noticed the couple) and did not say a word, but her heart turned to stone. So this wretched girl had stolen even her fat, ugly, amiable Hugh ! It was too bad. She was twenty-nine and had been friends with Hugh for nearly ten years. Whenever she reflected that the Squash, jolly as it was, could not go on for ever, always at the back of her mind there had been Hugh's comforting, comfortable personality. All of her that was feminine revolted against the abominable behaviour of this interloper. She was determined to do something desperate and at once : she was too excited to stop to the end of the dance, and it was for this reason that she had pleaded weariness and driven home. When she got to her room she undressed and put on her night clothes, over which she wore a becoming green silk dressing-gown. Then she let down her golden-red hair, which constituted her only claim to beauty, and sat by her open window to wait for Hugh's return. The dawn began to flush faintly through the deep grey of the sky ; the sky grew

almost suddenly bright with colour, then later, almost in a moment, the sun was up. The birds sang shrilly under her window in the clean, renewed air.

How haggard she was ! She looked at herself in the glass and then began to fumble in the bottom of a drawer for some rouge, bought many years ago and hardly ever used. She put plenty on, in the effort to make her tired face look as radiant as the dawn. Then she heard Hugh's heavy form entering the room next to hers. He had come back. She waited for another five or ten minutes, then she went to his door, knocked, and went in. She found him lying on his bed, flat on his back, dressed in his "folly" costume, with his hands in his pockets and his knees bent. He was smoking a cigarette and singing softly to himself, "*Who* paid the rent for"—puff—"Mrs."—puff—"Rip Van Winkle?"

"Hugh," said Dilly curtly, "give me a cigarette and get up and come and sprawl on *my* bed. I want to talk to you."

"Lord, how serious, Dill !" said Hugh, lifting his great bulk. "I'm dead to the world ; I am, really. Can't talk at all. Won't it do after breakfast?"

"No—come now. It *is* serious ; you are quite right."

He lurched into Hilda's room and spread himself on her low, narrow bed, covered with its neat

white counterpane. "It's no good, Dilly," he said, burying his plump, amiable face in the pillow. "I shall go to sleep. '*He* slept for *for*-ty years.'"

Dilly sat half-way out of her wide-open window, through which poured the sunlight, gilding her hair and making her look quite beautiful.

"Look here, Hugh, I saw you kissing that Harford creature this evening, but I'm not going——"

Hugh sat up as quickly as he could manage it, the bed creaking under his weight. "Well, I'm blessed, Miss Hilda Carter; you *are* a libellous woman! I never kissed her."

"You mean she wouldn't let you, perhaps? I can quite believe it; it isn't *you* she wants, you fat silly. She's only making a fool of you."

Hugh looked comically upset, the picture now of misery, and sat up, clasping his knees.

"No; she slapped my face," he admitted ruefully.

"Oh yes, and to-morrow you'll lick her boots, and the next day. The Squash never used to be like this, and I shall go . . . to-morrow! I can't stand it any more!" Dilly's voice began to give a little and the suggestion of a tear to gather in one eye. "We've been friends for about ten years, and always lived together."

"Dilly, you shock me," said Hugh, holding up one hand.

She laughed a little hysterically. "Anyway, I can't bear it in this house if you aren't going to treat me decently."

Reason was beginning to creep back into Hugh's tired and rather fuddled brain. "Dilly, this is awful," he said; "you are my best friend, and you've never asked me to treat you decently before. I thought you were a beautiful little institution, like the Café de l'Orient or the London Library."

"Well, I'm *not* an institution. I'm a woman—rather plain except for my hair, and I'm twenty-six, and I'm straight, and I've sort of got used to your fat——"

The tears began now frankly to trickle down her nose.

"Well, Dilly, this is awful," said Hugh. "I shan't speak to Rose in the morning; she's not our sort, somehow. Bit too exciting for us. And you always were a darling, and I'll never, never forget it again . . . 'pon my word I won't. I oughtn't to have had all that fizz, you know. That's what did it."

Dilly smiled a wintry smile. "It's no good, Hugh. You can't take your eyes off that girl; you've never been able to since she's been in the house. And she doesn't want you. It isn't you she's after. And . . . and I *do* want you . . . so there!"

"Well, I'm hanged, Dilly, of course we couldn't possibly part. I should fade away with

misery and never do any work. The idea's unthinkable."

"That's decent of you, Hugh ; but this Squash business won't work. It isn't what it used to be. It's all very well living in the same house as we do ; but look what happens as soon as a stranger comes into the place who hasn't our ideas. It simply makes Elizabeth and me foolish. I'm not a young girl now, and I don't see the fun of keeping it up any longer. We make enough to live on between us. Let's go. Let's go to-morrow and get rooms somewhere, then possibly we could get a flat. Anyway, let's go. Take me with you somewhere."

Hugh lumbered off the bed in great agitation. "Dilly," he said, enclosing her in his podgy arms, "we were idiots not to think of getting married before."

She pressed her burning face against his shoulder. "I'd come with you, Hugh, even if you didn't think of it now ; but it *would* be nicer to be married. I've never been properly unconventional, you know."

"Of course we shall be married," said Hugh firmly. "I'll buy a licence in the morning and we'll elope somewhere by the night train from Charing Cross." He began capering about the room again, announcing in a disgracefully "exhilarated" voice the fact that he was "Gilbert the filbert, the kernel of the knuts !" Then they stood

by the open window in the now warm and brilliant sunshine. "Why, good Lord, I say, Dilly," said Hugh as though some sudden burst of intelligence had illuminated his understanding, "d'you know I've loved you all these years frightfully, only we've become such a habit I never realized it properly till now." They kissed each other in the sunshine.

"You fat, ugly old darling, of course I knew it!"

"Gad! I feel as though we ought to tell some one. Shall I look in on old Guy or go to bed? Heads—bed; tails—Guy." He spun the coin. "Tails. . . . Bed! Don't forget you're marrying me in the morning: as soon as we wake up!" When he was half-way out of the door Dilly called out to him: "If you really mean it—about the licence, Hugh—I told you a fib just now; I'm not twenty-six at all, really; I'm twenty-nine . . . and a half."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE announcement of the defection of Dilly and Hugh came as a shock to the other members of the Squash, to old Madame Mirbeau, and to their many friends.

"It's like suddenly getting grown-up, all in one day," Elizabeth remarked lugubriously. "It's worse than leaving school ; it's like being divorced or something horrid, and of course it's the end of the Squash."

When it came to the day of the wedding and of departure from Fitzroy Square, Dilly found the pain of saying good-bye worse than she expected.

"I've lived in this house for eight years," she said, "and it's five since you and Maurice came . . . and it does seem a break. Oh, Elizabeth, it does seem funny, you know ! . . . I never thought much of getting married until the other day. I wonder if I shall like it ? " The minutest interrogatory flash in Elizabeth's eyes made her jump to explain. "It didn't seem worth while *not* to be ; after all, we shouldn't have liked it if *our* mothers and fathers had been eccentric ! "

Elizabeth had difficulty in restraining her tears

when she heard this artless confession. That Dilly should think it necessary to explain! Women, she reflected, must be all the same underneath, whatever poses and disguises they might choose to adopt!

Hugh had discovered "a real good sort who promised to put the thing through as quick as could be."

"You'll like him, Dilly, you really will. Just the sort of fellow you'd love to be married by. I shall have to warn Adrian not to strike matches near his mouth, but apart from that . . . bound to bring us luck, my dear. Regular topping fellow!"

When the first day came on which the ceremony could take place the Squash repaired in taxis to the dingiest of registrar's offices, situated up a flight of uncarpeted stairs, in a house in Charlotte Street. The official who took charge of the proceedings endeavoured to conceal his hiccoughs under a bureaucratic manner; while Elizabeth, half way between tears and guffaws, strove to control herself and Guy, while Adrian finally gave up the attempt.

To think that these two darlings should suddenly dash off and be romantic at their time of life! What mysteries, reflected Elizabeth, are the hearts of our friends!

The bridal feast took place at the Café de l'Orient, where the *patronne* surpassed herself, and

after it the whole party went to Victoria to see the couple off by the night boat train. Dilly and Elizabeth exchanged weepy kisses, while Hugh tried to be as funny as usual, and made jokes, with a gulp in his voice, to Guy, Adrian, Maurice, and Rose. Throughout the proceedings Rose was very subdued. Dilly was markedly cold as she shook hands with her ; and under his wife's watchful eye, Hugh also was anything but demonstrative. The bereaved Squash went back to the Café de l'Orient, and sat lugubriously at the little marble tables drinking black coffee and smoking. On one of the tables there was a drawing of Satan in a bowler hat with a cigarette lolling rakishly from one corner of his mouth, beckoning to a young man with a sedate expression who was walking up the steps of a building labelled " Wesleyan Chapple." It brought fat Hugh back in a moment : he could never spell, and the drawing had been done a few nights ago, on the spur of the moment, to illustrate one of his absurd stories. He had, in fact, given a mocking parody of Adrian's spiritual adventures, explaining how Adrian had been an earnest worshipper at a suburban meeting-house until Satan had lured him into Fitzroy Square. And Dilly too—her departure had much the same effect on them as the breaking of a time-honoured bank might have on its depositors. Dilly, the unemotional, reliable, generous, red-haired Dilly—twenty-nine *and* a half—it was

incredible that she should make this sudden dash for matrimony !

“ *Tiens ! elle va donc se marier,*” said “ the Duck,” in whose plump face regret and satisfaction were about evenly balanced.

With the departure of Hugh, Rose's attitude towards Adrian took a sudden change. She no longer held him at bay : she sought him out, schemed to go for walks with him, and contrived to be found constantly sitting by his side in the house. More as an aid to intimacy perhaps than for more serious reasons she took up journalism, and spent several hours in her room every day, writing articles. These, after consultation with Adrian (who was beginning now to acquire not only reputation but influence), she dispatched to different papers. The loosened birds, however, turned out for the most part to be homing pigeons, and the required “ stamped addressed envelopes ” had a depressing way of being returned—at the breakfast-table. For the unpleasantness of failure she exacted—as a child will exact a tip for having a tooth out—full measure of consolation from Adrian, whom she tried to make pleased with himself in the rôle of “ adviser.”

It must not be supposed from this that she was without literary aspirations of a genuine character. She had them in plenty, and was rather sore that her cousin did not offer to print her work in *The Monocle*. But this, though the magazine was

in a lamentably sick and almost moribund condition, he showed no sign of doing.

The sad state of *The Monocle* added to the feeling of depression which was beginning to damp the hitherto unquenchable atmosphere of gaiety at the Devil's House. For Lord Bridley's money had, in the hands of Mr. Murgatroyd Crouch, "expert in advertising," who acted as manager, disappeared with alarming rapidity, and the old man's guarantee was only for a year. Genial as he was to the Squash on his visits, he never forgot to remind them that his adventure into philanthropy would end on the date appointed. Once he told Adrian that Wilkinson, that invaluable watchdog, had mentioned that *The Monocle* was doing worse even than he had expected. It was far too "literary" to have a chance of ever becoming self-supporting.

Lord Bridley could not be petitioned for an extension, that was clear. Indeed, to Adrian's ultra-sensitive eye, he seemed a little tired and disappointed in the Squash, as though he had been baulked by them of something on which he had calculated. Neither Elizabeth nor Adrian affected not to guess what this was.

They noticed, however, that his interest in them revived when he met Rose, and that she always seemed demurely to encourage him. She even went to tea with him alone, at St. James's Square. Elizabeth had to be firm with herself not to raise an eyebrow, but she began to look at

her companion more keenly and critically than ever.

In order to keep things going, Adrian got in the habit of spending every day in the office interviewing Mr. Crouch and reading MSS. He waded through his correspondence with commendable thoroughness. It was chiefly this kind of thing—

DEAR SIR,—I beg to submit the enclosed poem, “Autumn Leaves,” for your kind consideration. A stamped addressed envelope is enclosed in case it is not suitable.

Yours very sincerely,

VERA PARSONS.

Adrian never ceased to be amazed by the endless torrent of bad verse that reached him, and he could not understand why the minor poets of both sexes showed a tendency to be “yours very sincerely” to total strangers. It was one of the mysteries of the literary temperament which he never fathomed. But harder task than reading MSS. was the supervision of Mr. Crouch. Adrian was utterly unable to grapple with the commercial mind, and the “*live* business man,” as Mr. Crouch described himself, was quite beyond him. He never could be quite sure whether one ought to ask it out to luncheon or talk to it in terms of “yours faithfully.” Mr. Crouch was short and fat, with a sandy beard and small green eyes. He wore habitually and rather on the back of his head a decrepit “silk hat” with no band. A black great-coat, also invariable, covered most of his garments,

while an astonishingly light pair of trousers emerged beneath it. To talk with Mr. Crouch, unless hard fact and bitter experience had ossified the heart, was for any one interested in the journal for which he worked an occasion of delight. All became right with the world: to-morrow any number of big "orders," for which Mr. Crouch had been ceaselessly canvassing, would be finally fixed up. Those twelve-month contracts for publishers' advertisements, on which the life of the magazine depended, were on the point of going through. "And when we've got them, you know, sir," Mr. Crouch would continue, "it's all plain sailing. The others are bound to come, *bound* to, and then *The Monocle* will become a property worth at least £5,000. There's no doubt about it." And there never did seem to be a shadow of doubt. Mr. Crouch's green orbs would grow dewy, and he would turn them up to the ceiling as though to them alone some radiant vision had been revealed.

"To-morrow, you know, sir, we begin our big scheme," was one of his favourite and most encouraging remarks. (He was making it until five minutes before it was decided to close down.) He had, too, a neat way of disarming criticism, which, with Adrian, was entirely successful. He would say, "Of course, you can't work up an advertising revenue all in a minute, sir . . . it takes time! But what I'm sure of is this: you've got a good proposition here in *The Monocle*. You see, it's

so very 'igh class. It touches a West End public, the cultured Upper Classes. A Sloane Street and Belgravia public. Why, there's no end to it, Mr. Corbet, absolutely *no end to it!* "

He would turn up his eyes as though lost in an ecstatic vision of these infinite possibilities. Adrian found he could not help feeling elated and hopeful after conversation with Mr. Crouch, though, had he been a little more reflecting, he might have realized that it is easy to be optimistic on £5 a week, with expenses. And had he known his Fleet Street—ah! no doubt *The Monocle* would still have been in existence and Mr. Murgatroyd Crouch, "expert in advertising," would have had no call to leave his gin and bitters in the saloon bar of his choice, for the cultivation of hopeful language at the expense of youth!

Side by side with the gradual decay of *The Monocle* went the gradual moral decay of Maurice Greene. Not even his respect for Elizabeth could keep him long unfuddled. And he had with it all that tiresome touch of genius which made it impossible for any one to let him walk on with an easy conscience. His habits, even his conversation, became at times coarse and disgusting, but he would often emerge from his worst orgies with a poem of a strange, delicate beauty of language and imagination—as uncarnal in its nature as anything of Shelley's.

What was one to do with him? His parents

were both dead, and he had £100 a year of his own tied up securely so that he could not touch his capital. It was impossible to be constantly looking after him, and no one except Elizabeth had sufficient tact to do it in a way which effected its object. For his friends to take a "strong line" was difficult, and Adrian, being very English, was conscious, acutely, that he had no *locus standi* in the matter, that it was not, when you came to think of it, any business of *his*. And so, when later on Maurice got an attack of delirium tremens, there was no one to do anything but Elizabeth. She it was who sent for the best doctor obtainable, had Maurice put into a nursing-home near Worthing, and got her parents (with whom she took the trouble to be reconciled for the purpose) to go to that dismal seaside place for the summer. During the excitements connected with Maurice's illness Adrian had very few opportunities of seeing and talking to Elizabeth. It was not until the evening before her departure for Worthing (where Maurice had been conveyed a few days previously) that he was able to talk to her. She could not elude him then; nor did she wish to. She came into his room and sat down by the window. It was a warm evening, cool and sparkling after the long, dusty day. The ceaseless roar of the motor omnibuses made conversation difficult.

"I hope Maurice will get all right soon," said Queen Elizabeth. "As he hasn't any people, I

feel the Squash is responsible, and it's an awful bore having to go to Worthing. No," she anticipated him, "I don't want you to come, Honey—not this time. I want to be alone when I'm not looking after Maurice. I can't exactly explain why."

He began to sulk a little at this—stupidly, as he so bitterly afterwards acknowledged.

"You never *do* want me now," he grumbled; "it's always Maurice, Maurice, Maurice! I don't see why his making a beast of himself should suddenly make him so attractive."

"Adrian!" She looked at him reproachfully, almost open-mouthed with surprise that he should have said just that. And he became sensible, as some do who not only love but are "in love," that he was saying and doing things never authorized by his brain or heart. He stood, as it were, aside, aghast at the mean words that were dropping from his passion-driven tongue. Even when he was saying what he did not intend, the thought of her, the sound and sight of her, filled him with an exaltation bordering on religious ecstasy. All the high thoughts of which he was capable, she evoked; something holy and pure, some sweet emanation, seemed to come from her clothes, to beam from her eyes, and he regarded her even now, in spite of their familiar, intimate intercourse of every day, from a distance, so that her personality acquired in his eyes additional interest and something of the

magnificence of what is unknown. He became very humble towards her, but as she was far from being a goddess, she mistook his humility for something unpleasant, and grew sensibly harder whenever he pleaded—without words or deeds, without himself even knowing that he pleaded—for her help in the most difficult hours his life was ever to know.

He had it on the tip of his tongue to beg Elizabeth to marry him at once, now that the days of the Squash as an institution seemed obviously to be numbered. But his consciousness of his own meanness held him silent. It would almost have been better—oh, it would certainly have been much better, he knew it—if they could have had an open quarrel. It would not so have been a sin against their love as was this faultiness of taste of which he had let himself be guilty, a meanness which seemed to require an elaborate explanation to put right. And how much, even then, how very much worse the elaborate explanation, the apology, would probably make it. If only they could get really furious with each other !

“ Oh, well, I must go to bed. My train is fearfully early in the morning,” said Elizabeth listlessly. Her sudden lack of dash and high spirits was more disturbing than a display of anger would have been.

“ I shall be up to see you off, all right,” said Adrian, “ and I wish you weren’t going.”

He took her, unresisting, alarmingly passive, in

his arms and kissed her good-bye; and as his lips rested on hers he looked questioningly into her blue eyes. And they, too, as they looked clearly back at him, were puzzled and a little sad. As she went quietly out, he felt with a kind of sudden faintness at the heart that they had completely misunderstood one another—a misunderstanding of that nebulous kind which only time or an accident, but not *words*, can ever put right.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IT was now the last week in June, and Elizabeth had just left for Worthing. She would not be back until the last week in July or the first of August, and the Devil's House now that she had gone seemed like a cavern with the ghosts of laughter playing about in its most obscure corners.

The house was haunted by her : something of her personality seemed to have been left behind in all the rooms she had frequented. Her empty chair was eloquent and the sound of her footstep on the stairs seemed, in a sense, never quite to have died away.

But in the misery of Adrian's discontent there came the consolation of his own gifts. Art, that divine mistress who in one form or another never denies herself completely to her lovers, began to fill the gap which Elizabeth's absence had made. And inclined, as he had always been, to be egotistical—especially in the days when his efforts had been set exclusively on endeavouring to secure a front seat in the Catholic heaven—he now became pleasurably excited by his own personality.

The final touches and proof corrections of his

first novel, which had been accepted by a firm of good standing, kept him busy and excited. The correction of the proofs was particularly thrilling. He carried the packet about with him continuously in the pocket of his coat, the unbound pages held together in a broad elastic band. The look of his words in print—set out delicately on the page between margins and so beautifully comma'd and stopped—caused him internal spasms of delight. And as he read over the passages which he had particularly exerted himself in writing, he felt a sensation like cold water running down his spine. They were good ! They bore looking at by every light ; they had foundations well laid, were finely constructed, ordered, planned. Each brick, so to speak, had been properly pushed and mortared into its place.

While the delights of creation absorbed him, his unexpected indifference became to Rose a daily torment, an insult, a challenge. Now had come the moment to which all her efforts had been leading up, and the results were horribly disappointing. She found herself cut out by a book, a mere brain-child. She lay on her bed at night writhing at the thought of him sleeping so close to her—so undisturbed. In response to a feminine instinct which she could not have analysed, she began steadily to fight his self-control, to fight his absorption in his art and his fidelity to his ideal. She set herself to seduce him with her

virile beauty. In numberless small ways she laid herself out to appeal to his senses. She wore soft, clinging clothes, and would contrive as often as possible to bring about infinitesimal contacts. She cultivated unaffected, boyish caresses, and would sit down beside him on the sofa in the studio and lean her breast on his shoulder with a spurious *sans-gêne* that was a grotesque imitation of Elizabeth's naturalness. Rose's upbringing had not been of a kind to enable her to be unself-conscious, and the disturbed state of her mind—apart from her conscious volition in the matter—lent her minute provocations a significance not to be mistaken.

Gradually, as the summer days wore on, Adrian's attitude weakened. He began to look for the caresses which had started by meaning nothing, began to follow the lines of Rose's figure with his eyes, to welcome her interruptions to his work, to think about her at night, and to listen for the sound of her soft breathing in the room next to his. He became torn in different ways by his heart and his appetites. He knew that he loved Elizabeth, that she stood for worthiness, for happiness, for all enduring things that are worth having ; that if he could win her it would be no cold, unemotional spinster who would yield herself, but a healthy, self-respecting woman, with passions like his own, but with twice his self-control—a woman who would bear him children and love him tenderly all his days and in spite of all his faults. But how

cold she had been to him lately ! Since that night—how he remembered it !—when she had seemed to show him herself, her true, passionate heart, things had not been quite the same. Shyly, perhaps, she had retreated from him. But surely on the night before she went away, if she had really cared, she would not have left him quite like *that*. An unworthy discontent grew like a fog to obscure the keenness of his mental vision.

And it was with the help of this sudden fog of unwisdom that Rose managed to make her effect. She woke up in him those forces which live chained—as a rule till some combination of accidents sets them free—in almost every human heart. He had fondly imagined that since the days of Cora Belmont he had recovered himself, that Una, in the person of Queen Elizabeth, had tamed the lion ! But under the influence of Rose's caressing ways he was experiencing a restlessness, a spirit of moral adventurousness, which both frightened him and made him curiously excited and light-headed. Why, after all, should he subscribe any more to a doctrine of restraint and self-mutilation ? Life was short, and during the history of the human race few had abstained from the pleasures of the senses, and that portion had done so for some excellent reason—they had physical disadvantages which prevented them or the compensations of religion which made their sacrifice worth while. But he—he felt superbly vigorous ; he knew

that he was well made and strong, and he had no longer any belief in a creed of abstinence and abnegation. He loved beauty and the sun, and as one set free after deep mourning rejoiced in all the colour and gaiety that life could afford. He did not see why he should be denied it all, and of Rose sometimes he thought that if she did not give herself to him she would do so to some other of his friends, and the result would be the same, but somehow less satisfactory ! It was a dog-in-the-manger attitude, he admitted. He would argue like this when Rose laid her bare arm across his shoulder and put her cheek near his, pretending to look at the book that he was reading. The warmth of her blood fired his own, and her eagerness went far towards making the worse appear the better cause.

In cool and lucid moments her mind and habits of thought were thrown up into sharp contrast, and he almost disliked her, so clearly did he see the mental gulf fixed between her limited vision and Queen Elizabeth's swift understanding. At these times he loathed himself for being attracted by her, saw very clearly the galling chain into which an intrigue with her might develop. But his minutes of introspection were, after all, comparatively few. The sun shone with a burning, dizzying brilliance ; the new book would be out in a few weeks' time : but for the pain at his heart all was very nearly right with the world.

CHAPTER XXV

THE night before Guy departed for Havre he and Adrian went out together for the purpose, cheerfully expressed, of getting drunk. They were fond of this phrase, for it was amusing to distinguish those who took it literally and those who did not. In this way it acted as a sort of sheep-and-goat separator. As it happened neither of them chose to get drunk by excessive drinking. They dined together quietly at a small restaurant in Jermyn Street and proceeded to the Palace to see Miss Elsie Janis. Then, after spending an hour at Guy's club, they set out to walk home to Fitzroy Street under the stars.

"Why don't you come with me to Havre, Adrian?" said Guy suddenly as they were walking down Charlotte Street. "It would do you good. You've never knocked about the world, you know. You're too ingenuous. Do you know, what's wrong with you is that you aren't either securely good or jovially bad. You're a wobbler—you'll make a mess of things if you're not careful."

"Oh yes," laughed Adrian. "You mustn't

forget I've been a pale young curate. I can't get out of the habit of taking life too seriously."

"Art, yes," said Guy; "but life, no. It doesn't do. I shall have to conduct a mission to you, I can see. I shall have to marry you to a clever, ugly widow of thirty-nine, who will see that you are well fed and guide you with feminine discretion in your choice of mistresses. Madame Mirbeau would do it if she were only twenty years younger. You want a nurse, you know, not a wife. You've too many illusions about women; you're too sentimental and *falutin*!"

"Oh well, you see, Guy, I'm not a *viveur* like you; I'm only a babe, in many ways."

"That's why you ought to come with me to Havre. A little healthy investigation of Antoinette and Yvonne—a week or two of lounging in the sun outside the Tortoni—and you'd get a new view of things. You'd be safer, too, than you are now. You sentimentalists, you know, make incredible messes of your *affaires de cœur*."

Adrian was greatly tempted to accept Guy's invitation and leave England with him. But for the necessity of finishing off the work in connection with his forthcoming book he probably would have done so. Fate, however, had conveniently provided the barring circumstance. They said good-bye outside the Squash's front door, the devil regarding them with his usual mockery.

"I shall be gone before you are up," said Guy.

“ Good-bye . . . and keep your head screwed on. It's no affair of mine, of course, only don't go and get yourself into a mess. You are getting so young now, compared with what you used to be seven or eight years ago ! ”

They shook hands, and Adrian went to bed, somewhat apprehensive and not quite sure what his friend had meant.

Within three days his work on the proofs of his novel was definitely over, the last revise had been corrected and sent to the publisher, and nothing remained but to await the coming out of the volume in the early autumn. It was now the second week of July, and Elizabeth was expected back in six or seven days' time.

“ Now that you've really finished with the novel, Adrian,” Rose suggested on the morning of the dispatch of the final bundle of proofs, “ do let us have a day in the country. It's ages since either of us had a proper holiday, and I'm just tired of writing rejected articles.”

The morning was very warm and enticing. They discussed the river, Hampton Court, Amersham, Windsor. All of these places sounded rather stuffy, as the day was evidently going to be broiling. Eventually Adrian suggested hiring a car and driving down to Crowborough. He had just had a kindly letter from Aunt Louisa, enclosing one of the familiar light-green slips. Aunt Louisa kept her money at one of the few remaining old

country banks which had not yet been absorbed by one of the great joint-stock companies. The cheques, with the eighteenth-century flourishes of their printed caligraphy and emblazoned with the arms of the family owning the bank, had always had a charm for Adrian, apart from the amount of cash which they represented. He liked to look at them, and parted with them to his own bank with a kind of regret. His aunt's bold "Louisa Corbet" had hardly altered a stroke since he first saw it!

The cheque had arrived appropriately, and Adrian looked forward to a day in the country with delight, prepared if necessary to spend the whole of it.

The car took them down to Crowborough in about a couple of hours, and they reached the hotel they had decided on just in time for luncheon. Rose seemed to blossom, like her name flower, in the unaccustomed delight of motoring. Her hazel eyes burned brightly, the colour in her cheeks was radiant and warm, her lips became more freshly red. Under the rug in the car they held one another's hands like children, and Rose nestled against her companion as though wishing to suggest how completely she was his.

At luncheon they were gay and talkative. As it was the middle of the week the hotel was not particularly full, there being only two other couples there, whose air of combined nervousness and

ecstasy made the atmosphere electric. When the meal was over they told the chauffeur he could amuse himself for an hour, and went for a walk across the wild moorlands of Ashdown Forest. Below them for miles stretched the green expanse of the Sussex Weald, fading into a distance that seemed veiled in faint blue smoke. The bright gold of the gorse and the purple of the heather surrounded them with a kind of music of colour which, in concert with the sunlight, played on and soothed the senses.

They found a sheltered place some way from a road, where a patch of grass made a pleasant spot for resting. "Let's sit," said Adrian, throwing himself down and feeling for his cigarette-case. Rose followed, slipping a little so that she had to grasp his shoulder to steady herself. In a moment his arm was round her waist, her head back on the grass, and his lips on her firm, white throat. She closed her eyes, 'yielding' herself to him, whispering his name, and he covered her mouth and eyes with kisses. Then he had a curious second of detachment and clear vision. He looked at her for a moment dispassionately, and noted various details about her appearance as she lay there with closed eyes. He observed that she had a tendency, that would increase as she grew older, towards a double chin; that her face in profile somehow resembled Mrs. Harford's; and that the faint growth of dark hair on her upper lip

might soon increase into a blemish. But when his glance left her face and followed the voluptuous lines of her body, in which girlhood and maturity seemed to be blended, the blood went again to his head and his ardour redoubled.

"Oh, Adrian," sobbed Rose, "I'm so glad, dear. I didn't think you cared. It can't be wrong, can it?"

The facile endearments which came to his lips he hated himself for uttering, but he could not shake himself free from the madness which had come over him. It was only when Rose seemed half to expect him to propose that he pulled himself together. He never deceived himself into thinking that his present mood was more than a momentary lapse from which he would recover. By a great effort of will he disengaged himself, lighted a cigarette, and lay on his back in the sunlight. A lark sang overhead, and all the little summer noises—the booming of bees, the clack-clack of the grasshoppers, and a hundred insistent, untraceable crepitations—came to his ears through the stillness.

How near he had been to making a fool of himself, he reflected, as a few minutes later they walked back together to the hotel across the moorland. Adrian could see Rose's bosom rising and falling under her thin blouse, and her eyes had a dull fire in them, while their lids seemed swollen and heavy. She looked altogether transfigured.

Her face during the remainder of the drive wore on it an enigmatic smile of satisfaction.

Adrian's emotions made him feel far less complacent, and by the time he got back to the Devil's House in the late afternoon he began to be thoroughly nervous and to realize what he had so narrowly escaped. How he wished Queen Elizabeth would come back and make it up! When he went into his room he found a letter from her. The sight of her handwriting made him suddenly tremble. The letter was merely to say that she had put off her return for ten days, and that Maurice was practically well. He studied it minutely, but there was not the faintest indication of any change in her attitude. It was affectionate, and there was nothing in it. So Maurice was well now, and she had put off coming back! The thought rankled; it roused again the old fogs of discontent. Why didn't he trust her? She had never failed him; it was only he who had failed. He would put this conviction to the test by writing to her; then she would come.

MY DEAREST (he wrote),—I got your letter this evening, and was so very sorry to hear that you had put off coming back for another ten days. I don't know what I shall do without you, and there are so many reasons why I wish you were coming home now at once. Dear, don't you think you could, as a special favour? I know it seems an odd thing to ask, and quite unreasonable, but I do hope you will be able to come either to-morrow or in a few days' time. Since you have been away I have discovered more than ever how utterly I love you.—ADRIAN.

He hurried out at once and posted it, heaving a sigh of relief as he heard it fall into the cavernous pillar-box. Elizabeth would come, and all would be well. She would put everything straight, restore him to sanity, banish by her superb health and high spirits the morbid fogs in which he was surrounded.

After dinner in the studio, *tête à tête* with Rose, an overpowering irritation seized him. Everything she said seemed to jar.

"I'm rather glad the others aren't coming back just yet, Adrian," she remarked by way of opening the ball. Her intimate smile as she spoke, which seemed to insist so clearly on their complete and secret understanding, annoyed him so much that he answered rather gruffly—

"Personally I shall be delighted to see my friends again."

She cowered back and writhed as if he had hit her with a stick. And her abandonment to his mood of the moment—a thing which he had never noticed in her before—made him want to strike her. Had he beaten her for half an hour, he was convinced she would have thrown herself at his feet with increased devotion. Her slavish capitulation bored him frightfully; he was too unhappy to feel flattered by it. At dinner-time they had eaten their food in comparative silence; and when the meal was over Rose jumped up to fetch him a cigarette and brought him matches from the

chimney-piece. It was all he could do to prevent himself from seizing the box and stamping on it and slapping her face. She struck a match for him and blacked the end of his cigarette. He took the box from her, the muscles of his face set in hard lines, and remarked in the placid tones of which a husband of years' standing might have been proud—

“You mustn't wait on me, Rose ; won't you have a cigarette yourself? ”

He rather liked himself for talking in this way, considering what he felt. For the next few minutes he cultivated a velvet affability, which reduced Rose to a state of terror. It was at first almost with relief that she heard him remark—

“I am afraid I've got to go out now. I promised to look in at a studio in Percy Street, and I don't suppose I shall be back till late. See you again in the morning.”

So he meant to go ! In a moment of weakness it struck him that now he ought at least to kiss her—she would expect it. And how she was kissable ! For an instant his determination wavered, but with an effort he took his hat and left the house. When he had gone she sank in a heap on to the chair in the hall and wept bitterly.

Madame Mirbeau was quite startled when she came up from the kitchen to post a letter, but she considered tears and suchlike displays as being all part of the fun of being loved and being young.

She patted the girl as she would have patted a snub-nosed kitten with an injured paw, and enfolded her on her ample bosom, where Rose's tears made a little damp patch. Then she bustled the girl up to bed, and went to fetch her a bottle of Florida water, a glass of port wine, two novels, a few of Adrian's cigarettes, and half a box of peppermint creams. And with these consolations—together with the excitement of Meriel Vernon's latest shocker—Rose found her broken heart half-way towards being mended. After all, she still had a clear ten days !

CHAPTER XXVI

DURING the next few days Corbet glared at the postman whenever he made his appearance as though he were a person of scandalous private life, who, moreover, withheld intentionally the letters entrusted to him. The postman wiped his brow, and thought of beer pensively, remarking always that he was "very sorry, sir, but there is nothing name of Corbet, not this post." During this period Adrian continued to avoid Rose as much as possible by locking himself in his room or going for long walks. Except at meals, he hardly spoke to her, but on the afternoon of the fourth day they were brought together by a state visit of Herman Mainwaring. Adrian was looking out of the window of his room at about half-past four, when he noticed an imposing group of persons alighting from a large touring car at the door of the Devil's House. There was nothing for it: he must descend and receive them. They consisted of Mr. Mainwaring, who had always had a fondness for the Squash since they had taken over *The Monocle*, and his suite. His Impresario, a literary agent, who attached himself exclusively to the great man's service, was holding his arm familiarly; behind him were grouped his proof-reader, a youth with straw-

coloured hair who was suspected of writing poetry, and his shorthand-typist, an excessively trim young woman, in a neat frock, with a neat face, well-manicured hands, and a sparkling set of teeth. She had brown hair and green eyes, and was the embodiment of tact. Three years of pouring out tea for all the literary lions in Great Britain had given her the most remarkable self-possession. You could rely on her to stage-manage any conceivable situation.

Mr. Mainwaring shook hands with Adrian, and greeted Rose politely as Adrian's well-beloved, with the immediate, overpowering insight of the acute observer, who sees through a brick wall without the slightest difficulty, discovering often, as in this case, what is not there. Miss Mortimer, the secretary, then stepped up and took charge, arranging everybody in appropriate seats, pairing off the Impresario with Rose, leaving Mainwaring to talk to Adrian, and herself taking up again her peripatetic flirtation with the poet, a flirtation which was subject to these little interruptions, but which otherwise went continuously on and got no forwarder.

"Glad to see you and Greene have kept on printing what the public won't stand," said Mainwaring kindly to Adrian, who was proud of this appreciation from a man who "knew."

"Nothing seems very exciting that we've been able to print so far," he lamented in reply.

"Nothing ever does until it's at least ten years

old. Look up these numbers of *The Monocle* ten years hence. You will be astounded—such brilliance ! ”

“ Yes,” said Adrian, “ but none of the things seem so thrilling as the stuff we used to perpetrate as undergraduates. We were so awfully clever then. I was amazingly clever when I was seventeen. I positively scintillated. I wrote poems to the moon when in the earlier stages of intoxication, and uttered epigrams under the willows on the Cherwell, and published a book called ‘ Les Nuits Sataniques.’ I’m never drunk now—not in any of Baudelaire’s meanings of the word—and it all seems just a little dull. Other people’s work, too, as well as my own. The stuff people send to *The Monocle* represents all the latest schools, but though it’s terribly ‘ intellectual,’ it somehow fails to be exciting. Every one seems frightfully middle-aged. There’s no insolence in the contributions, no exuberance. They never say dreadful, biting, or witty things, which one can only just print ; they haven’t any overpowering enthusiasms ; they are all excessively cultivated. They, none of them, have any gusto ! ”

“ Oh, *Punch* is never as good as it was,” said Mainwaring sympathetically. “ Go away for a week with a boxful of Bulwer Lytton. You’ll soon get tired of gusto, and turn to the observers—Flaubert, for instance. If you studied ‘ Madame Bovary ’ for a lifetime you might become more

intimate with Emma than he was himself. The people are there ; he pulls up the blind and shows you how to look. He has a fine mental 'gusto,' which expresses itself in a most painstaking and deliberate art, not in a flow of windy rhetoric which has obviously carried the writer off his feet. Oh, no ! Exuberance is a mistake. You should read some of my earlier novels if you want to see just how far you can go. I am the only English writer of the first rank who combines impetuosity with a perfect style. You see, I've taken the trouble to learn *how to do things*. The others just write."

Adrian, who appreciated self-appreciation, agreed cordially. He had not read Mainwaring's early novels, and quite meant to get hold of them.

"By the by, Watts," said Mainwaring, addressing the proof-reader and knitting his brows, "what *were* the names of my first three novels? I can't for the life of me remember."

" 'Rose of Gaunt,' 'Christine Milward,' and 'Warbeck's Ransom,' " replied the tow-haired poet without a moment's hesitation.

"Oh yes," said Mainwaring, gazing into nothingness. "'Warbeck's Ransom' is a remarkable piece of work. The Pope told me the other day, when I was dining with him, that it was the only good historical novel that had ever been written in England."

The mouths of the little circle made round "Oh's ! " of wonder, and the Impresario looked

ecstatic. They were sitting in the same room with a man who had dined with the Pope ! Mainwaring, with the incense beginning to rise round him in clouds, was now in the most angelic of tempers. He adored making effects.

“ To return to your point about ‘ gusto,’ Corbet,” he continued, in his kind, sleepy voice, “ I think I know what you are really looking for. You’ll get it very soon. You are tired of the false values which almost all modern writers give to things ; you want to have people’s eyes cleared so that they can discriminate between what matters and what doesn’t. You are looking for a sense of proportion. You’ll get it in a fortnight, my boy, and *The Monocle* will be the first victim of the spirit you are longing for.”

“ What on earth do you mean ? ” said Corbet, his jaw dropping. A note of seriousness and sincerity had crept into Mainwaring’s voice, quite different from his usual note of jesting pompousness.

“ There will be a European war in a fortnight . . . the greatest war the world has ever known. Men will be slain by hundreds of thousands ; whole populations will be terrorized and decimated. The importance of the small emotions of neurotic young men and women will then be dwarfed, and 99 per cent. of the fiction that is produced will automatically cease to matter ! You will get your sense of proportion then and your gusto, for all art that doesn’t strike down to the very heart of things will be swept away.”

“ Good God ! ” said Adrian. “ Surely we shan’t be mad enough to go to war ! It’s so ridiculously old-fashioned. Besides, we’ve nothing to do with Serbia, and every one in England sympathizes with Austria in wanting to ‘punish the Archduke’s murderers. . . .”

“ Wait ! ” said Mainwaring enigmatically. “ I may be wrong, but I shall be surprised if we are not at war within a fortnight or three weeks ! ”

“ Oh, you’ve always been a pessimist ! ” laughed Adrian. “ We’re in the twentieth century now ! ”

The subject dropped, and Mainwaring got up to go. “ I’m going to take you two to Lady Cohn’s,” he suddenly announced.

Lady Cohn, wife of Sir Adolf Cohn, a commercial magnate whose Jewish blood gave him an appreciation of the arts, had a big house in Belgrave Square, where she encouraged the lions to roar together. She also encouraged cubs, on the principle that the child is father to the man.

“ We will go there for an hour,” he went on, “ so you and Miss Harford can run off and put your things on. It is just possible that Adolf Cohn might take over *The Monocle* if Bridley’s tired of it. . . . Afterwards we’ll dine at Kettner’s, and then go and hear George Robey. True art nowadays can only be found in the music-hall, you know.”

He would not consider a refusal, and swept the whole suite, swelled by Rose and Adrian, into his enormous, panting car. The strange party bore

down Charlotte Street and down Oxford Street and Park Lane into Belgravia, and the sight of small boys and undistinguished vehicles dashing away from his chariot brought the friend of popes and potentates unusual satisfaction. He liked his own quite genuine importance. To Adrian, the expedition on which he had embarked, before he had been able to collect his wits together, was intensely galling. He did not care a brass button now about the shutting-down of *The Monocle*.

"Will she write to-day? Will she come? Will she refuse?" were the questions with which his brain was throbbing. And there was Rose, too, with whom he had at once, by these good people, been "paired." He felt in a miserably false position—false to Elizabeth, false to Rose, false to himself. The hour appeared interminable during which he listened to talk which at any other time would have interested him immensely. But how trivial seemed literature and art compared with life itself, compared with the tortures and temptations of human relationships !

Coming back alone with Rose in the cab after the theatre, he felt again the growth of a hunger which he could barely hold in check, when she turned instinctively to seek his encircling arm. It was not love—that he knew whenever he called up a mental vision of Elizabeth—but it was something fierce and compelling.

When he got in there was again no letter, and

he went miserably and disconsolately to bed. But the letter had arrived by the morning; Madame Mirbeau brought it up on the tray with his coffee and rolls. He held it in his hands for several minutes trying to guess the contents from some minute indication in the handwriting. The "Adrian Corbet, Esq.," was big and decided, but "7 Northampton Street" was very hurried, and "Fitzroy Square" dropped right down into the corner. He could not guess anything at all. Finally he tore the envelope open, his heart standing still.

DEAR ADRIAN (he read),—I got your letter all right, but I am afraid I really can't manage to get back before the time I said in my last. You see, I promised faithfully to pay a short visit to my brother and sister-in-law, and I can't very well get out of it. What is the trouble? I am sure it can't be anything very dreadful, beyond Rose's powers of management. Give my love to Madame Mirbeau, and be a good boy.

Yours,

ELIZ. REG.

He lay back in bed and gripped the pillow in his hand.

"Why should she treat me like this?" he thought. "She does not care a bit!" And the reference to Rose caused him an unreasoning anger. Rose, after all, had come to the Devil's House on Elizabeth's invitation. He cursed himself for not having asked Elizabeth to marry him before Rose appeared on the scene, when—he knew it instinctively—there was some chance of his being accepted. Now it was too late. She distrusted

him, she did not really care, she was urging him to go to Rose for consolation !

His mind full of despair and recklessness and injured pride, he got up and went downstairs. Rose was sitting on the sofa in the studio waiting for him to appear. She looked a little haggard, but had dressed herself in a becoming light blue summer frock. She lay back on the sofa with her knees crossed, her well-shaped legs clad in thin silk openwork stockings, her feet enclosed in patent leather shoes. He kissed her good morning, and she put round him a warm arm, naked from the elbow, with a kind of natural *câlinerie*. He abandoned himself to the mere physical pleasure of the embrace in a way that he had never done before, and he found it easy and unexpectedly pleasant. The "second-best" was, after all, a thing not to be despised. It was Elizabeth's fault; she had urged him to seek consolation, and surely she could not grumble if he did so.

When a week had passed something seemed to snap inside him. He no longer offered any resistance to the impulses which seemed all to be driving him in one direction. A change, too, seemed to have come over Rose ; there was no longer any of the abject submission of a few days ago. She pretended now to keep him at bay. She chaffed him and piqued him to pursuit. How gay she seemed !

There came an evening—it was a Thursday—when he took her out to dinner and shared a bottle

of wine with her. His mind was dulled, he could not think, and, as Guy had predicted, his very innocence increased his weakness. He cut himself adrift from his moorings and floated on the swift stream of inclination. . . . Late that night Rose's hazel eyes told her looking-glass the secret of fierce desires and the accomplishment of an evil determination. But for her smile of unpleasant satisfaction, the radiance of her sensual beauty had never shone so warmly. She had him at last. The long resistance had broken down. . . .

It was not till the following morning, when Adrian woke late to a day of rain and chill, that he realized where his feebleness had landed him. A flash of intuition told him he had sold his inheritance, had thrown away his one chance of happiness, in a moment of madness. There was a newspaper on his bed and he opened it to escape from his thoughts. Russia and Austria were at each other's throats ; Germany was threatening France. . . .

But he was not much interested in the European situation, regarding it as a matter for students to excite themselves about, a thing which could never affect him personally. He had something far more important to think about. He had to face Elizabeth. Lifting the newspaper, he suddenly noticed that there was a letter under it which he had not seen. He grew a shade paler when he saw the writing on the envelope, and his heart seemed literally to sink. She had written at last !

CHAPTER XXVII

THE rain continued to fall with a mournful steadiness ; evidently it was to be one of those cold, uncomfortable summer days which are so characteristic of London. Adrian went to the window of his room and looked out on the desolate road. He held Elizabeth's letter in his hand. It was too late now ! He knew that, for him, what had happened was irrevocable. He was not like Guy, a happy pagan who took with philosophy the adventures and *bonnes chances* which the gods gave him. He could not shake off the far-reaching effect of the religion from which he had imagined himself free, the old views of life which he had thought for ever discarded, the unquiet conscience of his Philistine days. It was as Father Martin had warned him ! His religion had obstinately stuck ; he had not dodged his faith. And Elizabeth ? Perhaps she had changed her mind, perhaps she really cared and would return. He prepared himself for what he read—

MY DEAREST BOY (ran the letter),—I was a beast to write as I did. I've just realized it horribly, and I'm coming back at once. I'm twenty-five, dear—twenty-five, and it isn't fair to go

on like a schoolgirl, shilly-shallying. So I'm coming straight back *to you*. I shall arrive on Monday, the 4th, in time for dinner. Your loving and rather contrite

ELIZABETH.

She was coming in three days ! It was too horrible ; his anguish scored deep lines on his face. He was never a business man, and oh, he felt that now he had made the infinitely bad bargain—the worst of both worlds ! Elizabeth, of the large toleration, would not tolerate this in him ; he would never tolerate it in himself.

In the agony of his remorse he clung to the thought of Father Martin and Aunt Louisa, both of whom would shake him out of his morbidity ; but he had not the nerve to approach either of them. And Elizabeth was coming back on Monday ! After breakfast and before Rose made her appearance he went out for a long walk in the wet, without a coat.

The idea came to him to fly suddenly and leave England for ever, to escape to some fortunate island where there was sunshine and a palm-tree and a crystal lagoon. There he would sit with his head on a brown girl's lap, her soft arms holding over him a mango-leaf to keep the sun away. He thought it was a mango-leaf, but as it was many years since he had read "Typee" he was not quite sure. London, at all events, seemed used up and horrid. Why had he not gone abroad with Guy before it was too late, too

late? If there was a war—which seemed almost certain, though these things usually had a way of getting fixed up in the end—his way out would be simple.

It was not until after luncheon that he regained the Devil's House : at half-past three, to be precise. Entering the studio, the sudden clatter of feminine tongues prepared him for the sight that met his eyes. His aunt, holding her lorgnette in one hand, was walking rapidly up and down the room, leaning on her walking-stick. Sitting bolt upright in the largest arm-chair and alternately sniffing and scowling was Mrs. Harford, while by her side, on a small oak stool, Rose sat and watched the two of them.

"Miss Corbet," Mrs. Harford was saying in her most withering tones, "your age protects you ; but I beg you most earnestly to take warning."

"Now, Rachel," rapped Aunt Louisa, "none of this nonsense ! Where are your manners? You must really try not to be such a fool !"

Mrs. Harford looked visibly wilted after this, but she was wiry. It didn't matter much to her being knocked out, for she had such a quick recovery.

"Manners or no manners, I say once for all that your nephew has been living alone in this house with my daughter for nearly a month, and if he is a gentleman, a man of honour, his duty is clear !"

“Any British mother would say that, who had so little control over her daughter and had brought her up so badly!” Aunt Louisa remarked. “I tell you your daughter came here entirely of her own accord. Adrian never invited her. She practically invited herself. If she didn’t leave when Miss Moore went away, it was probably because you had made it impossible for her to return home.”

She looked keenly at Mrs. Harford, whose flushed face indicated that her conjecture was correct.

“Understand me quite clearly, Rachel,” Miss Corbet continued: “my nephew will hold himself under no obligation at all with regard to your daughter, for what had occurred. I should imagine they would be highly unsuited for one another, and if I took it upon myself to oppose my nephew’s actions in any way I should oppose this marriage. I don’t say the girl is greatly to blame, but I am very sure that *you* are.”

“I shall pray for you,” said Mrs. Harford, sniffing through an inflamed and purple nose. “That is all I can do. I shall pray for you night and morning. Rose, go and get your things on and come with me! You must not stay in this house another day——”

Rose had taken very little part in the conversation up to the present, but her mother’s abrupt command made it necessary for her to come to

a quick decision. Should she go with her mother and trust to Adrian's honour, or should she stay and brave out his meeting with Elizabeth? She hesitated only for a second before replying : "What do you mean, mother? . I'm not going home. I shall stay here."

Mrs. Harford made a movement as though she were washing her hands of her daughter and rose to go. "You have made your own bed," she remarked bitterly, with her hand on the door, "and so you must lie on it !"

Aunt Louisa broke the tension after Mrs. Harford's departure by going into little peals of amused laughter, which she prettily stifled out of deference to Rose. At this point Rose had the grace to admit that discretion was the better part of valour, and as soon as the front door had closed upon her mother's back she slipped up to her room.

"Ridiculous woman ! " laughed Miss Corbet as soon as the daughter had gone. "She is really *impayable* ! Pray for me, indeed ! But look here, Adrian," she said, turning on him a cold, black orb, "what have you been up to? I had an intimation that you had been getting into mischief. Rachel Harford had the same notion about her brat apparently, and wanted to bully you into an engagement. But listen to me. There is no reason in the world which should be strong enough to make you marry that girl when Elizabeth Moore

would have you. If you have made a serious fool of yourself in Rose's direction, I'm sorry for you. . . . I'm sorry for you. But I won't ask you. I'm an old woman ; it's not my business. Remember, though, you are to take no notice of Mrs. Harford's nonsense. Elizabeth's absence puts you under no obligation. That woman should have looked after her brat herself. Adrian, what a priceless fool you are ! " she added, and Adrian thought he had never seen her looking so old and bent. " Go and see if my carriage is at the door," she said. Hearing that it was there, she hobbled out to it, refusing tea, and was driven away—a tirelessly amused, but disappointed, old woman. Adrian turned back to the house disconsolately. Aunt Louisa had cheered but hardly convinced him. He had been an unpardonable fool ! His aunt would never forgive him when she knew ; it would sour the last few years of her life. In one moment of utter idiocy he had done a cruel injury to the two beings he loved best in all the world. He went upstairs, and as he passed Elizabeth's room on the way to his own he noticed that the door was open and, on tiptoe, went inside. There was her plain iron bed, painted white, with its snowy coverlet. On the walls were various charcoal drawings of her own and by different members of the Squash, a picture of a boy bathing, by his father, which he had given her, and some figure studies by Hugh and

Guy Bridges. On the chimney-piece stood a small bronze copy of the Discobolos of Myron. In the bookcase, which occupied the wall space between the fire and the window on the right-hand side of the room, was the miscellaneous collection of books which Elizabeth had amassed. She was entirely unconscious of accepted criticisms, but adventured just as she pleased in the world of reading. Harrison Ainsworth's "Rookwood" jostled "Mademoiselle de Maupin," while two of Bulwer Lytton's romances were wedged in between "Marius the Epicurean" and "Les Fleurs du Mal." On her writing-table was a photograph in a heavy silver frame, which had fallen face downwards some time when the room had been swept. With a strong feeling of self-disgust at his curiosity—he felt he was behaving like an untrustworthy housemaid—Adrian lifted the frame to see whose photograph it was. It was his own.

He went quickly out of the room, closing the door behind him ; his heart was thumping like a hammer. He threw himself face downwards on the bed in his room ; he found himself praying to the God he had forsaken, in his agony. Instinctively the habits of his childhood and boyhood had cropped up again. Father Martin had been right !

On his chimney-piece he found a letter addressed to him as editor of *The Monocle*, which had been forwarded on from the office. It was from Mr.

Crouch. He was on the point of fixing up some very big contracts, very big indeed, but of course "that sort of work takes time with a really high-class publication." He had not yet succeeded in getting more than one advertisement for a fountain-pen—which belonged to a company that did not pay (though Mr. Crouch drew a handsome commission on the order)—but he had infinite hopes for the future.

Adrian was unable to concentrate his thoughts on Mr. Crouch or his hopes. He sat desolately by the window, looking out into the familiar road. He would have to tell Elizabeth ! He would have to tell Elizabeth ! . . .

Through the open window came the raucous shout of the newsboy, "Germany threatens War with France and Russia." . . .

CHAPTER' XXVIII

ROSE did not take the war excitement well. She saw too clearly that her own fate was in the balance, like the fate of her country, and now that what she had been longing for seemed so nearly within her grasp she could not support with equanimity the thought of losing it. Adrian might be killed or ruined ; some dreadful tragedy might occur which would dash the cup of success from her lips. Then there was the visit of the redoubtable Aunt Louisa, who had looked at her so vindictively. Ever since she was a little girl, when the old woman had first spoken to her at her father's funeral, she had been afraid of those piercing black eyes.

It occurred to her that if she married Adrian Aunt Louisa might be so angry that she would not leave him any money. Though she liked Adrian as a lover, she didn't want to marry a poor man if she could help it. She looked on marriage only as a means of gaining her freedom, of becoming rich. . . . Things were indeed difficult !

While she was sitting in her bedroom on the

following afternoon, trying to unravel the baffling problems of her existence, Lord Bridley called unexpectedly at the Devil's House, in his car. Adrian was out, to the old man's evident satisfaction, and he carried the delighted Rose back to St. James's Square to tea. She pretended to be angry with him as she lay back in the luxurious, silent-moving Rolls-Royce because he could not tell her definitely whether England was going to declare war. He said that he believed the Cabinet was divided, that no one knew yet, and that it would probably depend on what happened about Belgium. "But don't you worry, little Rose," he added. "The war shan't hurt you, my dear. I'll look after you!" He laid his small, withered hand on her knee and patted her. Rose's instinctive disgust at his elderly caresses was tempered considerably by her appreciation of his eminence. His promise, "I'll look after you," put exciting ideas into her head. After all, he was only sixty-eight (she had been into a Free Library to look him up in the Peerage), and he was enormously wealthy and important. He stood for and could give her all the things that she had read of and dreamed about for years and years. Her precise ambitions went to her head like wine. Who could tell what she might not accomplish?

In her realization of what his friendship might mean to her she could not immediately bring herself to treat him with the degree of scorn which

instinct told her would be necessary if she wanted to hold him. She debated in her mind as the car glided back to St. James's Square whether she should tell Lord Bridley about herself and Adrian. She decided eventually to say nothing. So many things might happen ; it was obviously unwise to burn any boats. Before she left Bridley House to return to the Squash she allowed the old man to give her a kiss. The surroundings seemed to her so overpoweringly magnificent that she forgot to feel disgusted.

"After all," she said to herself, "he isn't so *very* old !"

Throughout the stormy, black week-end, when London frankly gave itself up to an attack of nerves, Adrian avoided Rose as much as possible. He spent almost all the day at his club, and never spoke of anything except the news, the probability of our going to war. Rose dreaded the coming of Elizabeth on Monday, but knowing Elizabeth's pride and Adrian's rather mawkish ideas of honour, she was confident, now that he had compromised her definitely, that things would be all right. After her thrilling experiences with Lord Bridley she was no longer quite sure what she wanted.

Adrian thought the week-end was the longest he had ever lived through. The feeling that the whole scheme of his existence was breaking up all round him was as nerve-shattering as the

thought that he would have to be straight with Elizabeth, and that being so would end his chances of happiness.

At last the day dawned, morning wore to afternoon ; she would come in an hour ! Adrian sat in his room without a book, with the window open, looking down on to the road.

While he was waiting he heard the faint swish of skirts, and Rose came swiftly into the room. Her face was very pale and her hazel eyes looked red and swollen. Her beautiful dark hair was negligently coiled on her head and wanted "doing." She seemed anxious that outwardly her appearance should indicate as much as possible the change which had come over her. She came towards him and stood by his side looking out of the window, avoiding his face. A big tear gathered in the corner of one of her eyes, trickled down her nose, and fell on his hand. He could not speak. She made no sound either, and but for the evidence of the tear he could not have told that she was crying. Her immobility, however, was to him a more bitter reproach than any passionate fit of weeping could have been. He put his hand on her shoulder, and she sank down sobbing on to his knees. "You do care for me, Adrian? Say you do," she whispered, acting consummately. "Mother was perfectly awful the other day. She frightened me, I can tell you."

"Of course I care," he lied, to please her. ("What a beast I am become!" he thought.) "Cheer up! Go and lie down for a bit." He led her gently to the door, and she docilely submitted and returned to her room, while he took up his vigil at the window. It was nearly time. A dreadful nervelessness overcame him. He had collected a bundle of letters and MSS. to read, of proofs to correct and pages to pass for the press, but he could not rouse himself or pull his wits together sufficiently to look at them. He sank gradually into a sort of comatose condition. But at last, amid the familiar sounds of the street, he detected the noise of her taxi. He leaped to his feet, his heart beating strangely, his hand shaking with an intense nervousness. Yes! It was she! The cab drew up; there she was paying the man and getting out; Madame Mirbeau was taking charge of her luggage. She looked up at his window and blew him a kiss, and he could hear her as she entered the hall, three floors below.

"Hullo, Rose!" he heard her say, through the open door. "You all right? Adrian is upstairs, isn't he? I saw him at the window just now."

He could not move to meet her. He stood where he was, in his room, half-turning his back on the window, facing the doorway. He could hear a light footstep coming quickly up the stairs. Was it Elizabeth or Rose? At first he could

not distinguish, but in a moment he knew. His breath came short ; she was on the landing now ; now she was at the door.

“ Elizabeth ! ” he whispered when she at last confronted him—“ Elizabeth ! ” His face had grown grey and his mouth was drawn down at the corners. The girl went quickly forward and took him by his two hands.

“ Oh, you poor dear ! ” she said whimsically, looking at him sideways. “ You do want Queen Elizabeth to look after you.”

He laughed an almost natural little laugh.

“ You’re just like fresh air, you know,” he said, “ to a drowning man. So you’ve really come—at last. I thought you didn’t care,” he went on, half to himself.

“ So did I,” she whispered. “ But oh, my dearest, I found I was wrong, hopelessly wrong ! I can’t do without you ! ”

She put her arm round his waist as she spoke, and looked up at him with infinite tenderness. Then her lips sought his, naturally and inevitably.

Suddenly Adrian fell back. “ Oh, God, I mustn’t ! ” he groaned. “ You’ve come back too late ! ”

“ Too late ! ” Elizabeth faltered. “ What do you mean? Tell me—we’ve always been frank.”

“ No, I can’t tell you . . . ” he began.

She looked at him sharply ; and then her face hardened and an expression of resentment came

into it which he had never seen before. She had understood. "What a fool I've been!" she said in a low voice. "And what a fool you've made me, Adrian. . . . How could you!"

She turned reproachful eyes on him and suddenly shivered. "You know, Adrian," she said, "it's that religious touch about you which is so hard to bear. You'll never be able to shake it off now. You believe in the bottom of your heart that only Christians are really good, and when you do a low-down action yourself you do it like a feeble curate—with 'terrible grief' and all that rot, the moment after!" She looked at him again half-contemptuously, as though in an attempt to spur him to action. "You know, you are just like a clerical co-respondent!" she said bitterly. "I can just imagine your remorseful letters being read in court!"

How she loathed his contrition! Why couldn't he beat her, catch her by the throat, and say he wasn't going to put up with any of her falutin nonsense? In one way she would not have cared how many young women he flirted with during her absence, if only he had been man enough cheerfully to acknowledge them, to tell her not to be silly about it, and that he loved her furiously and best of all. This flabby exhibition of grief, this maundering about "sin" (contemptible, worm-crawling word!) sickened her and made her love die in her heart. . . . Why did he stand there

looking contrite, saying nothing! Why didn't he box her ears, or tell her to be quiet, or laugh at her?

He lost his moment, and when she carried her head high out of the room it was he who was crushed.

He stayed where he was by the window until Madame Mirbeau called shrilly to him to come to dinner, and as in a dream he went downstairs to the dining-room. Elizabeth was there first. She smiled at him conversationally, so that he had to bite his lip to preserve his self-control. He had a sinking in his heart which made him fear that he would faint, but with an effort of will he managed to present a more or less normal outward appearance. If Elizabeth could play the game so well, he thought, so would he.

"I had a jolly time by the sea," chatted Elizabeth, half to Rose and half to Adrian. "Lots of bathing and fishing. I caught a sole with a shrimp-net, a baby one; it was such a dear. I've got some splendid beach sketches, Adrian," she babbled on. "Some of them are really good. I'll show them to you when I've unpacked. What have you been doing while I've been away?"

She laughed engagingly, ending on a hard note which Adrian alone could detect.

"Oh," he said, spurred to rivalry by her well-assumed indifference, "Rose and I had a very good time. Didn't we, Rose?"

Rose beamed consciously, but she was annoyed at not being able to score exactly the triumph over her rival for which she had hoped.

"We spent a day motoring to Crowborough, after I'd finished correcting the proofs of the novel, and contrived to amuse ourselves," Adrian continued.

"Oh, how dense of me!" said Elizabeth, with a faint break in her voice, turning to Rose. "I ought to congratulate you, oughtn't I? You have fixed things up, haven't you?—at least, Adrian hinted you were engaged. I don't know if he was anticipating."

Her smile was charmingly natural. Rose was obviously delighted, and her pleasure was so great that she got up and insisted on embracing Elizabeth on both cheeks. Her face wore a satisfied smirk as she sat down, after plying the lash.

"Oh, I'm so happy!" she said. "This dear boy has been a perfect darling."

"That has done it!" said Adrian to himself. "I must get out of this at all costs."

"Mother will be most awfully glad," Rose continued with obstinate cheerfulness, addressing her remark equally to Elizabeth and Adrian, "and it will be so jolly to be friends again. Don't you think it's wretched quarrelling with one's parents?" She positively bubbled with ill-concealed delight. She had won! She had conquered; she wanted to rub it in.

Elizabeth cordially agreed with her, but Adrian was silent. He saw the future stretching out before him. Reconciliations with Mrs. Harford, a quarrel with his beloved Aunt Louisa, marriage, respectability . . . and church-going. If only there really *was* a war, what a blessing to him it would be ! ”

Rose, by a stroke of intuition, left Elizabeth alone with Adrian after dinner.

“ I suppose the war, if it really comes, will rather upset your plans ? ” remarked the Queen icily. “ When had you arranged to be married ? ”

They eyed each other for a long moment. Neither would be the first to break the artificiality of the situation.

“ I don't know when I shall be married,” he said. “ As you say, the war will alter things.”

It seemed incredible that he could not go to her, take her in his arms and wring some honest words from her heart. But he was tongue-tied. He could not break down this absurd barrier which had suddenly sprung up. Quick and light as fire Elizabeth was, but she was not necessarily “ easy.”

“ What a farce this is ! ” was all that, very recklessly, he was able to say.

“ Why prolong it ? ”

“ How cruel you are ! ” he sighed. He did not look at her as he spoke. Had he done so he would have seen a sudden spasm of anguish shoot

across her sensitive face and a look of dumb suffering come into her soft eyes. There was a little pause, during which her lips parted as if she were about to speak, and she breathed quickly in her distress. Then, deciding not to say anything, she turned away, to hide her face, and walked towards the door. He followed her quickly, but to his surprise she hastened her steps, hurried downstairs, and out of the front door into the street. Newsboys were shouting at the top of their voices, "England at war!"

"I thought I heard them," remarked Elizabeth sedately as with complete self-control she bought a paper and walked slowly back to the house.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE sudden outbreak of the European war—the long-talked-of and much-prophesied Armageddon—was a sensation of such colossal magnitude that the majority of English people, born and brought up in an atmosphere of complete security, were completely knocked off their balance by it. It seemed like some incredible nightmare: and the quicker men were to visualize the horror that had been let loose, the more stupefied by the calamity did they become. . . . Different temperaments were naturally affected by the event in different ways; but there were few indeed who succeeded in preserving an equal mind, or even an outward appearance of stolidity. Many imagined starvation to be imminent, and purchased food in reckless quantities (only to let it grow mouldy and uneatable); others viewed life as if they had already been sentenced to a violent death, and penned death-bed epistles to their friends and relatives. Nearly every one imagined himself to be completely ruined, and the emotions consequent on this belief caused a most astonishing slump in "love." Many sentimental maidens found their men abomin-

ably preoccupied, and the comparative values of sentimentality and selfishness were ruthlessly exposed. Indeed, the whole 'social façade which we have agreed to erect for the concealment of our characters received a shock as if it had been struck by some spiritual "Jack Johnson." For a week at least polite draperies were torn away from Truth, and the naked soul confronted the naked soul.

In the Squash the quietest and most collected person was Elizabeth. It perhaps needed an occasion such as this to bring into evidence the courage, clean as fire, with which she was fulfilled. Her courage was shown as much in what she refrained from doing as in her actions. She just sat quiet, and talked little. When her father and mother made the suggestion that she should leave Northampton Street and return to them, she rejected it. It was characteristic of her to think of others in an emergency; and she realized that Madame Mirbeau would never be able to meet the rent without her weekly payments.

Rose's outlook was altogether different from Elizabeth's. "Self's the man" was her watch-word, and the war, by endangering her plans for her own advancement, filled her with rage and desperation. Her thoughts turned from Adrian to Lord Bridley, and from Lord Bridley to her mother. How was she going to live? Could she bring Adrian up to the scratch now that war had broken out? Would it really pay her to try to do so?

What was going to happen to people's incomes? The last point hit her terribly. Her whole heart had been set on a life of ease and luxury, such as she had so often read about in novels. In future every one would be poor! The champagne standard would disappear, except for the few. Like a baffled schemer she worked herself into a "state of mind" in which self-pity was the principal emotion, perplexity a good second. To temporize while considering the various lines open to her, she spent much of her time at "St. Chad's," trying to bring about a reconciliation with her mother. She refused to go to live permanently at "St. Chad's," because she could not bring herself to leave Adrian alone with Elizabeth, and wished also to be free to see Lord Bridley. She cultivated the old man as far as her native prudence would allow her—that is to say, quite sufficiently to keep him excited about her. He was too old to be perturbed by the war, but he was keenly interested, in a senile way, in its amazing influence on female eroticism. As this curious August wore to a close he was able to amuse himself with quite a number of new sensations. . . .

While Rose made friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, and reopened negotiations with respectability in the shape of her mother, the project of her marriage with Adrian was somehow dropped. It was he who ought to have referred

to it, of course. But he appeared to have forgotten all about it. The honourable scruples on which she had counted seemed to have been all pushed on one side. Observe him as she would, she could gain no inkling of what was going on in his mind. All she could be certain of was that the hold which she had succeeded in gaining over him just before the war and before Elizabeth's return, had vanished utterly. He seemed not to think of her at all. He no longer desired her : try as she might, she could not trouble his senses. Even his conscience, that tender growth on which she had so implicitly relied, seemed hardened and atrophied. The only fact which consoled her was that though he and Elizabeth continued to live under the same roof, and to meet daily, no reconciliation had yet taken place between them.

The war at first had the effect on Adrian of a terrific physical blow which left him stunned. When he woke up he found the comparative values of everything in life had changed. Women, for instance, were completely unimportant. They belonged (unless they made themselves useful) to the light side of life, which had been swept away for the moment. Life, in the presence of the colossal forces of destruction which had been let loose, had resolved itself curiously down to essentials. When the appeal came for the new armies—utterly unmilitary, and in many other ways unfitted, as he was—it never occurred to him that

he could stand on one side and not do his share. "Art" seemed a laughable life's occupation in the face of so much reality. How could any man set himself for hours to try to describe the emotions and psychological processes of utterly unimportant men and women of his creation, when there was real work afoot? In face of wholesale destruction, misery, death, hunger, wounds, famine, the breaking-up of a seemingly established civilization, how could art expect any longer to hold a man's attention? Only love, religion, and doing one's duty mattered any longer. An unsuspected instinct, inherited through long generations, asserted itself strongly in him. He was sorry for Rose; he loved Elizabeth dearly: but for the moment he had other things to occupy him.

On the day after the splendid tragedy of Mons he and Guy Bridges, who had come back hurriedly from Havre, enlisted together, and in the absorption of his new life the emotions of yesterday died into insignificance. Had he treated Rose unfairly? Every one had to suffer, and there was no reason why she should be an exception. He hated the idea of an elaborate farewell, and said good-bye to her the night before he had to leave for camp, without letting her know clearly that she would not "see him off."

Elizabeth he said good-bye to in the morning, in Guy's presence, just before they left the house. She had from the first guessed the meaning of

his sudden visit to Aunt Louisa at Old Compton, and with the clairvoyance of love had read his heart and anticipated his every action. The wall of ice between them had, however, not been broken down during the long weeks since the beginning of the war. Adrian did not expect that she would soften towards him merely because he had become a soldier. He offered his hand a little mournfully. She took it. Then, to his surprise, she kissed him on the lips, putting her arm round his neck. Neither of them said anything : there was nothing to say. Guy Bridges turned his back on them for a moment, cursing himself for the sudden lump which had risen in his throat. He had an intuition of what had happened, though Adrian had told him nothing.

Elizabeth left Adrian, with the thought that she had ceased to matter so very much. It filled her with pride in him. To her he seemed now, in his comparative indifference, a man at last ! But her joy in this was not without its undernote of sorrow, and her half-frozen heart ached as it grew warm.

CHAPTER XXX

AFTER Adrian and Guy had gone off to Chelmsford with their regiment, Elizabeth lived through some of the most miserable days of her whole life. She and Rose maintained an outward show of friendliness, but the difficulty of keeping up the make-believe became greater every day. She could not forgive Rose for what she had done, and she cursed herself for her own folly, which had been so largely responsible for the occurrence which had destroyed her happiness. She wished Rose would at least have the good feeling to go.

Rose, however, had no intention of letting her actions be in any way modified by the indulgence of fine feelings. While her plans were getting disentangled, and until she had made up her mind exactly what she wanted to do, it suited her to stay on in Fitzroy Square. As the days went by and Adrian only answered her letters by occasional postcards, she began philosophically to eliminate him from her arrangements. Her dreams, thanks to the excitement of her first introduction to luxurious living occasioned by her

growing intimacy with Lord Bridley, began to take a form in which Adrian had no place.

During the time when she and Rose were the only inmates of the Devil's House, Elizabeth found herself watching her rival with a fierce concentration which alarmed even herself. And always the one question was clamorous in her brain: "Does this girl really want Adrian, and could they possibly be happy together if they married?" She knew that Adrian really cared nothing for Rose, and gradually she grew more and more confirmed in her belief that Rose's point of view was entirely calculating. She was not really affected by Adrian's absence. She did not miss him as Elizabeth missed him, but, on the contrary, she seemed almost immediately to become absorbed in new interests, excitements, and hopes. She was constantly away from the house, sometimes until a late hour at night. She did not take Elizabeth into her confidence as to where she went, but, as though to explain her preoccupations, she made vague references to her intention of setting up a little flat with "a girl friend," in whom Elizabeth could not for a moment believe. The strain on her self-control of Rose's presence under the same roof became almost unendurable to Elizabeth, and but for her promise to old Madame Mirbeau—and a kind of pride which made it hateful to her to retreat before the enemy—she would have liked to have gone back to her parents,

or to have gone to stay with Hugh and Dilly, who had a spare room in their little flat in Chelsea. At last her endurance was rewarded, and towards the end of September Rose announced her approaching departure. Apparently she was going to the mysterious establishment with "the girl friend," to which she had alluded with so much gusto, and Elizabeth was amazed and mystified by the impression of opulence and self-satisfaction which she had contrived to give. For some time past, at a moment when most women were looking their worst as regards clothes, Rose had been growing noticeably smarter in appearance. She seemed curiously to have blossomed and developed, to have become more finished and mature—years older. All the crudities which had been so noticeable when she had first come to the Squash from her home, had disappeared. To Elizabeth's keen but rather childlike eye it was all an inexplicable mystery.

Glad as Elizabeth was at the thought of Rose's departure, the prospect of being all alone in Number 7 would have been a melancholy one if it had not been brightened by the hope of seeing Adrian. He had written to say that he hoped soon to get a few days' leave. . . .

During the long, dreary, and terrible days since her return from Worthing she had come to long for Adrian with an intensity of love which was a revelation to herself. The strain to which her

passion for him had been subjected had at least had the effect of revealing to her the secrets of her own heart. And she could see things more clearly now—could see how it was that Adrian had failed her. Her love helped her to see by intuition what her curious innocence prevented her from knowing in any other way. It was partly herself, but principally Rose, who had been to blame. Often she debated with herself whether, in view of this, what had happened really gave Rose a legitimate claim on Adrian. She had thought so at first ; but she did not know Rose then as well as she did now. A word from her to Adrian and she knew that everything could be made all right between them. Was there any reason of honour why she should refrain from speaking that word? Was Rose worth the sacrifice she was making? No ; she could not think so ! The more she watched her the more convinced she became that Rose was heartless, selfish, and dangerous. Her instinct condemned Rose ; had always condemned her from the moment when she had first met her at the Café de l'Orient. She was bad through and through—a clever, determined, calculating woman, with a black heart. And what did it all mean, this curious change that had come over Rose, this blossoming into new clothes, and this approaching departure to the mysterious flat? Elizabeth ' shuddered when she thought of the harm which—thanks to her obtuseness—Rose would

have been able to do to her beloved Adrian if it had not been for the war. The war had shown up Rose in her true colours, and it had also helped Adrian to get rid of his exasperating "remorse." It had put things in their right perspective, had cleared the air. It had stiffened Adrian's character, and it had changed her own character as well. Why should she not make a struggle for happiness, since she could see now so clearly where it lay? She knew she would make Adrian a better wife than Rose. What was the use of being proud any longer, of indulging in scruples? . . .

On the day previous to the one fixed for Rose's departure, Elizabeth went with Dilly Winterton to a *matinée* at the Haymarket Theatre. After the theatre they walked back together down Charles Street, with the idea of crossing St. James's Square and walking up St. James's Street to Piccadilly, where Dilly would find an omnibus for Chelsea, and Elizabeth one going in the opposite direction, down the Tottenham Court Road. Elizabeth had been talking to Dilly about their friends—about Maurice Greene's recovery and departure to France as a war correspondent, about Guy's and Adrian's letters from camp, and about Rose. Elizabeth was talking about Rose when they reached St. James's Square. Suddenly Dilly startled her by clutching her arm and whispering, "Look, there she is!" She turned her head

in the direction Dilly indicated, and realized that she was looking at Lord Bridley's house. His large Rolls-Royce, which had several times made a sensation among the foreign waiters in Charlotte Street, *en route* for the Squash, had evidently just stopped outside the door. She was just in time to watch Lord Bridley take Rose's arm and walk up the steps of his house with her, talking and laughing. Their look of intimacy was so unmistakable that even Elizabeth—a babe in such matters for all her candour of the *enfant terrible*—could not fail to grasp its meaning.

“So that's what she's up to,” remarked Dilly in her matter-of-fact voice, as they walked on hurriedly into St. James's Street. “I always expected it. I shouldn't wonder a bit if she succeeded in marrying the poor old thing! There isn't anything that creature is not capable of. Didn't I tell you about her, Elizabeth, when I found my old Hugh trying to kiss her in a cab?”

Dilly looked so much the prim matron as she made these comments that Elizabeth couldn't help smiling at her. “No one would guess you'd lived in the Squash for eight years, Dilly, to hear you!” she said. Dilly's only reply was an audible snort: words failed her.

After she had seen Dilly safely into a Chelsea omnibus, Elizabeth got back somehow to Northampton Street. She was so absorbed in her thoughts that she hardly noticed where she

was going, and kept getting into the wrong omnibuses. What she had seen that afternoon seemed to alter her whole outlook on life. Her heart beat quicker for her joy, and her brain became on fire. She was not a devious woman nor accustomed to finesse. She had shy reserves and her full share of maidenly hesitations, but she had also the directness of the simple and the single-hearted. Her discovery seemed finally, beyond any doubt, to give Adrian and herself a right to one another; and having come to this conclusion, it did not occur to her to hesitate in acting on it. And Fate, oddly enough, seemed at last to play into her hands. Telepathy between lovers is, perhaps, a not uncommon phenomenon; in any case, a letter came from Adrian by the last post that night announcing his arrival on Friday, on week-end leave. It was Wednesday, and Rose would be gone to-morrow; she would have him to herself. . . .

The steady-nerved Adrian, abounding with health and vitality, and refraining from getting into states of mind, whom Elizabeth met at Liverpool Street on Friday evening, took her completely by surprise. Though it cost her a moment's disappointment, it seemed on the whole too good to be true! They said very little about Rose, and Elizabeth, lying out of a kind of natural delicacy, merely remarked that she "thought Rose had gone

home to her mother." They both refrained from adding that they wished she had never left that good woman's keeping. . . .

Adrian was curiously subdued and undemonstrative—absorbed in his work, happy. Only his eyes told Elizabeth that his love for her had, if anything, been strengthened and purified by his experiences.

When they got back to the Squash much time was spent in talking to Madame Mirbeau, who went into feminine ecstasies over Adrian's appearance in uniform, and was overjoyed to hear that he expected to be gazetted very shortly. Like the historic Duchess, she adored *les militaires*, especially young officers with moustaches—the genuine article, not the deplorable British tooth-brush!

After dinner Elizabeth and Adrian sat alone in the big studio, by a roaring fire, thinking and talking of the days that now seemed so immeasurably far off—the other side of the gulf. Adrian took her beloved hand in his and looked at it as at something he could not hope to possess. And then, at last, the barriers between them seemed entirely to have melted away.

"Adrian," said Elizabeth shyly, putting her arms around him, "I've been a beast. Take me, darling. Don't be scrupulous any more. I've no scruples left. If it's wicked, then be wicked for my sake. You won't be doing her any harm.

. . . No such luck," she added, with a little chirrup of humorous vindictiveness, "the damned little swine!"

Adrian kissed her amid their mingled happy laughter. "Darling," he said, "thank Heaven you aren't too perfect! What an escape we've had—what an escape!"

"Our Lady of Pain, dearest," whispered Elizabeth, "has heard our prayers. She's come down and redeemed us from virtue." . . .

Elizabeth felt her heart melting in her body. All her stored-up love for him was released. As she looked at her man, so strong and self-controlled, she realized that he had got rid of all that morbid contrition which she so despised, of his hated sense of "sin." He was a man now: well-knit, determined, absorbed in something almost more important than his love for her, great as she knew that to be. He would not care any longer about Rose. And he would manage her. He would stand no nonsense. Probably, she reflected, he had occasionally been unfaithful to her while he had been at camp—without thinking anything much about it. Oddly enough this thought almost gave her pleasure, for she knew that his heart and soul were hers. He was quite different. How strong and well and happy he looked!

Adrian turned and met her blue eyes, filled with adoration, smiled, and took her in his arms.

“Well, it’s an ill wind——” he whispered. “War does *some* good, anyway !”

Elizabeth turned her eyes away from him for a moment. “Do you know,” she said, “I believe it has done good to Rose as well as me. It has helped to give us both what we really and truly wanted.” . . .

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